



CUMC Family,

I've reiterated time and time again that in this pandemic there are no knowns or absolutes. And so, with heavy hearts, I tell you that we are going to shut down in-person operations, again. Over the past week, Caledonia has seen 65 new cases of COVID, and that number is only going up. Kent County has a positivity rater of 11.7%, which many health experts say is above safe levels. Many of these cases are coming from small gatherings, rather than crowds with large numbers of people. Classrooms, churches, small house parties, and more have become the worst spreaders of COVID-19. In conversations with worship leaders at Caledonia UMC, it seems that being cautious and careful is the route we want to take. It is disheartening, certainly, to feel as if one of the most comforting things in our lives, coming together as a church community, is unsafe.

Many churches in the Michigan Conference of the UMC are making the same decision. Some because as congregants tested positive for the virus after being in the church and others because they did not want to run up to the wall of exposure at church. In many ways, Caledonia UMC is choosing the latter path, though we did find out about one of our small groups being exposed to COVID two weeks after the fact.

One of my colleagues, a Deacon who works in public health, said, quite bluntly, that shutting down at this point is the most loving thing to do. Limiting gatherings and exposure will not only keep us safe, but will also work to not overwhelm our health system, like in April. By sacrificing in-person worship, we will aid in saving lives.

And so, we will shut down for in-person worship and small groups. Our Bible Study on the Sermon on the Mount will be moved to Zoom. Our Ecclesiastes Bible Study will be suspended until further notice, though I encourage you to continue to read Ecclesiastes and reflect on how it speaks to your life. Youth Group will also be shut down for the time being. Necessary committees (Trustees, Finance, and SPRC) will be able to meet, with masks and social distancing ***absolutely required***. But, I do ask those committees to consider 1) If their agendas can be dealt with over email, and 2) To consider using Zoom as a platform to meet. Either Erin or I will continue to be in the office, most days. If you need to come into the office for any reason, please call beforehand and let us know.

We will continue with our digital services, on Facebook at 10 AM. Each Sunday, a small worship team will gather in the Sanctuary, much like we did throughout the months of June and July. We will also continue to offer call-in options and will be updating the answering machine at the church by every ***Friday*** with the call-in number and access code for each week. I also encourage you to consider creating a Facebook, if you have access to the internet. I have heard a story about a 95 year old man who did not have a Facebook before the pandemic hit, but who created one solely for the purpose of watching worship. He did not friend anyone, make a profile

picture, or post anything. He simply created it to watch his church online. Each week, I post the Scripture and sermon text on this site:

<https://pastorelizabethhurd.wordpress.com/2020/11/02/november-1st-2020-all-saints-day/>. I also embed the worship service from Facebook, which you can watch, later.

Also, knowing that not everyone has used Zoom quite yet, I am more than happy to offer Zoom lessons, over the phone or in the Conference Room of the Church. Just call the Church and set something up with me.

Here are some other things that will be happening at Caledonia UMC during this time:

- We will continue to have monthly communion, though it will be in person and outdoors. The first Sunday of each month, I will offer in person communion in the lower parking lot at 11:30. It will certainly be chilly and cold over the next few months, but I encourage you to attend. I will also continue to offer to bring communion to your homes, should you want me to.
- Be on the lookout for at home Advent activities. We will be sending out emails about how you can incorporate Advent practices into your every day. We will also have Advent activities for kids and families.
- For children and families, Laura Homminga and I encourage you to look at the Michigan Conference's Children's Playlists, filled with great ideas for at home faith formation activities: <https://michiganumc.org/resources/childrens-ministry-tool-box/faith-family-playlists/playlists/>
- We will continue to collect presents for our God's Country Cooperative Parish Angel Tree. You can bring them to the office Monday-Thursday from 9-2. Or, you can drop them off at the parsonage Sundays from 12-3 or Monday-Thursdays from 3-5. We are collecting them until November 15th.
- You can continue to give tithes and offerings online or by mailing checks into the church. You can also set up automatic deductions with Jim Klingensmith.

With the holiday season approaching, I know there will be many questions about Christmas. With everything going on right now, we are in the middle of making plans for both in-person and digital services. I will continue to update you on Christmas plans.

If you feel as though in-person worship is what you need at this moment, I understand. And I am more than happy to help you find a church whose in-person policies you feel most comfortable with. I always say that it doesn't matter where or how we worship, so long as we keep our focus on God and our hearts on Jesus.

Know that we will continue to monitor the situation in Caledonia and make decisions accordingly. We will keep you updated. In the meantime, I continue to encourage you to do what we know works to help stop the spread of the virus. Limiting gatherings with those outside your homes, wearing masks in public spaces, maintaining six feet of social distancing, and quarantining if you come into contact with the virus.

This is a hard decision. I never take the decision to stop in-person worship lightly. I know that many of you will be disappointed by this news, and believe me I am, also. But as we continue to walk through this pandemic, with so many unknowns and so many last minute changes, let us pause to breathe. And remember that God shows up, even in the middle of chaos and uncertainty. One thing we can remain confident in is that God shows up. So I invite you, over the course of this time, to take five minutes each day to pause, breathe, and search for where God is showing up in your life. Pause, breathe, and remind yourself that God is with you.

Blessings and Peace,

Rev. Elizabeth Hurd.