

Greetings all,

If ever the season of Lent has felt hopeful it is now. What a year it has been. Unfortunately, now over 500,000 people in the United States have died from the virus. Fortunately, there is finally some good news. Covid-19 infections are on a downward trend nationally and finally the vaccine is being distributed. I know it seems like a slow process. It is. And, I know waiting for “normal” seems like forever but there are indeed hopeful signs. Even so, for now we must remain vigilant about keeping everyone around us safe. John Wesley claimed, “First, do no harm.” Last night Church Council met and discussed the possibility of returning to in person worship. Because Shawnee County is still in the “red zone” the decision was that we need to wait until the infection rate declines more in our community. We will keep watching and praying and doing our best to stay connected virtually. Worship will continue on Facebook Live. Council will meet again on April 6<sup>th</sup> and hopefully be able to schedule reopening shortly after that. We did also agree that if we see positive trends before that time we would meet sooner and make plans to reopen more quickly.

I so miss you all. I never dreamed we would be apart for this long and I had no idea how essential technology would become. For clarity, do understand that you could be meeting in small groups with masks and social distancing. We had no problem doing so at our council meeting. So, support groups and ministry teams could be meeting here at the church to plan creative events for now and into the future. Sharing meals at this time is probably not a good idea, but that should not prevent gatherings. I will be trying to figure out how to offer some alternative in person small worship/spiritual growth options during Lent. Stay tuned.

So, you may wonder how we are doing financially. We are hanging on. Our income is far less than previous years but our expenses are less as well. Please consider catching up with and staying current with your 2021 financial commitment. We know this year has been a financial strain on many. If you are able, please do help with your financial gifts which will continue funding our mission and ministry. I’d even suggest that if you received Covid Relief Funds you donate 10% of that to the church. We, the church, are not eligible for any more relief this round. What we received earlier did indeed prevent us from needing to make substantial cuts.

We continue to be in mission. Last Saturday we served 314 family units with our Harvesters Distribution. That was approximately 900 individuals. Those receiving help are always so incredibly grateful for anything and everything they receive. The next distribution day is March 6<sup>th</sup>. We always have wonderful, hard-working volunteers. That said, we are always willing to welcome others. Contact Vicki Claassen if you would like to help. I also know I Care appreciates all we continue to do to support them. I will let you know their needs as I learn of them.

This Sunday is the Second Sunday of Lent. We continue our series, “The Cross Walk.” The scripture is Luke 19: 1-10. The sermon is, “Words Motivate.” The service can be watched live on Facebook Live by visiting our Shawnee Heights UMC page.

Let me know how I might help you connect and stay grounded as we climb back from the challenges of this past year.

Stumbling forward, hoping for grace, *Barb*