

All Church Letter regarding subtle changes in our COVID-19 policy at Hudson UMC
Sunday, November 8, 2020

Dear members and constituents of Hudson United Methodist Church,

This letter is to re-explain our closing policies for our church building due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

You may be aware that our bishop for the Wisconsin Annual Conference, HeeSoo Jung, sent an open letter to all Wisconsin United Methodists to close our buildings due to the pandemic. The big word there is “requesting.” It is never within a bishop’s authority to close a local church. A bishop can ask, and we can say “Not yet.” What Bishop Jung really wants for us all to be healthy and well, so that when we gather again we are all there. The reality is that geography in a pandemic does not follow either state or conference boundaries.

Therefore, clergy of the Northwest District are continuing with our written plans for remaining open or for closing as we consult with the lay leaders our members have elected. As the appointed pastors in this district, only we along with our district superintendent have the final authority under the Book of Discipline to make the decision to remain open or to be closed in either a public health emergency or another sort of natural disaster.

Bishop Jung’s concern gave us an opportunity to review our action plans with our district superintendent Rev. Barb Certa-Warner. Our district policy for all Northwest District United Methodist Churches is to close our buildings for two weeks following a public health notice of an in-building exposure with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. We have had a three members test positive, and because they have not been in the building in the 14 days before their positive test our building can remain open. Please hold those members in prayer and follow their example. Their caution has protected us all.

If our building needs to be closed our church’s ministry will go on. Only our custodian, Mike Galloway, will be allowed to work in the building as he does all that is necessary to re-sanitize all areas. Kathy, Lynn, Jane, and I will work from home and perhaps have an outdoor meeting on the benches under the big cross in our parking lot. Worship and other small groups will continue in our established virtual formats. The podcast worship service will continue on YouTube, via an email link Kathy sends by 8 a.m. on Sunday morning, or via the Facebook link John posts each week as soon as the final edit is done. It will also be available on the River Channel later in the week. Kathy has a plan for continuing her work that includes USPS delivery of sermons and bulletins if she needs to remain out of the office for two weeks. We also have a parking lot, and the worship team is planning and working to be

able to offer parking lot worship at 10:30 on Sunday mornings if our building needs to be closed.

Our St Croix County Board of Supervisors are considering an ordinance that will enable the county Public Health Officer to issue public health orders such as the one we specified in our original plan for having our building opened or closed. Because we do not have that ordinance now, I asked our Accountable Leadership Board to consider three options for establishing when I should make the call to close the building based on local considerations.

The closing option we have selected by majority vote is to tie our building being open to our public school buildings being open. Just like a snowstorm, if our schools are virtual our church is virtual. The schools make this decision every other Wednesday, with the next review is scheduled for November 11th. If they should decide on that day, or any future time, to go to Level 4 and make all instruction virtual, we will activate our virtual plan immediately. Those with sanctuary worship reservations will be notified in advance by phone.

The only difference our church going virtual along with the schools from what happens if we have an in-building exposure is that Kathy will be able to do her work in the office. While we are virtual, it will be safer for Kathy and for you if we all use either email and Vanco for our giving, and an outdoor drop box for anything else you need to bring to church. Kathy will fine tune this detail in her office function plans.

Thank you for doing all you can to “love your neighbor” as we collaborate to make it through this pandemic. We all hope that when we can gather again, we will all be present.

Grace always,

Rev. Dawn