



His Mansion

*A newsletter from
First United Methodist Church
of Southbridge*

"In my Father's House, there are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you..."

JUNE 2020



"How did it get so late so soon? Its night before its afternoon. December is here before its June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?"
Dr. Seuss

Reminder:

We meet for worship at 9 am and enjoy fellowship, coffee and treats afterwards



FROM PASTOR SABINA'S DESK

Dear friends in Christ,

I cannot believe that the time has come for this newsletter again... In some ways, time has passed slowly due to the confinement. In other ways, time flies anyway if you stay busy and busy we have been!

People have been complaining about reopening the economy and reopening the churches. I do understand everyone's impatience but, at the same time, let's remember that we are on God's time, not ours. We want to continue being safe and making sure others are safe as well. As much as I would like to go back shopping and get a haircut, I can wait a bit if it means saving lives.

Now, about churches reopening. First, churches have never closed. The buildings closed. Church is the people. At First United Methodist Church, we may not have met for worship on Sunday morning but we had live worship on Facebook. We held the Bible study on Zoom. I have been offering a story time for young and old on Mondays at 3:30 and a devotional time on Wednesdays at 3:30, both live on Facebook. We have continued our meal ministry and have even volunteered to bring 48 lunches (3 days worth) to the homeless hosted under a tent at St. Luke's Guesthouse. We have been in touch with each other.

I understand we miss worshipping in the building, seeing each other and enjoying fellowship. However, all that talk about reopening brings church to the belief that we are a mere Sunday worship. Being a Christian is a 7x7 life filled with worship, individual and as a community. Reading the Bible, listening to hymns and Christian music, talking to God while walking in the park, praying, these are all forms of worship. Continuing to focus on the building instead of the community and the changing world will also continue bringing down churches. Maybe, this is something churches found out while being shut down. We had to become creative. We had to use technology, find new ideas. Will we ever go back to normal? Maybe not the way it was. But that's a good thing.

(conclusion on page 3)

June

Lord, make us kind and considerate, always trying to make the work of others easier and not harder.

Prayer of the month

Oh Yes! IT'S
FREE

Hungry?
Lonely?

Please join us
for our free
weekly meals
Mondays—5

pm

Fridays—5 pm

On the menu (examples):

Soups, chili, spaghetti and meat sauce, casseroles,
BBQ, salads, bread, fruits, ice cream and other
desserts.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Until further notice, meals will be “to-go”.
Please call Pastor Sabina if you need a meal to be
delivered to you during voluntary quarantine.



**CHURCH
ONLINE**

Join us for Church at 9am on Facebook!!
Go to The Southbridge First United Methodist
Church Page and just watch!!

JOIN US FOR BIBLE STUDY



"Come out of the clutter and clanging of our culture and discover the peace of meeting the God of the Bible in the pages of His Word. Engage Bible Studies take you verse by verse into the richness of the Scriptures in ways that impact your heart and illumine your mind."

“Bible 101” every Monday at 6:30pm

(dinner will be served)

Important Note:

Until further notice, our weekly Bible study will be cancelled until we can meet again face to face.

OUTREACH

Go out and BE the church!

As you know, we have been helping St. Luke’s Guest-house, providing three days worth of lunches to the 16 homeless people quarantined under a tent. The project is getting wrapped up as the tent will be dismantled the first week of June. We have been blessed to have been able to participate and help and very grateful to the Worcester Fellowship volunteers who provided cold cuts, cheese, chips, cookies, cash and gift cards. It has not cost a church a penny! They also have helped with the hot meals on Friday. Viewpoint Church in Southbridge has been cooking on Mondays. We are blessed!!

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

FROM PASTOR SABINA'S DESK

(conclusion)

Why a good thing? Because obviously, something has been going wrong with the way we have been doing church these past decade. Going to church is not the cultural, Sunday morning routine it used to be. Young generations have stopped coming. Tastes have been changing. Modern music, different worship space... Churches that have been successful have been very active in youth ministry and activities that get people in the door through other entry points, beside Sunday worship.

Now back to reopening. Several churches have been reopening as per State authorization. Our Bishop has delayed reopening until June 1st, with all state guidelines plus a few others (no singing...). Many Methodist churches have decided to remain closed for several reasons: space capacity (a problem we obviously do not have), the fact that people at risk such as the elderly have been asked to stay home, the fact that many churches do not have air conditioning and we will not be authorized to use fans. Hot weather + masks - fans = discomfort.

So what are we going to do? We will start Sunday worship in the building again, probably later in June. However, I am planning on organizing outdoor worship, Place is to be decided. At least, we will have social distancing and masks without the discomfort and the risks.

Sovereign Grace Chapel has hired a cleaning company to prepare the Sanctuary. We will do the same for the lower level.

Please let me know if you have any thoughts and concerns.

Stay blessed, stay safe!

Pastor Sabina



In June, we will be continuing the sermon series "'Why? Questioning God". Join us to be challenged, to learn more and maybe to find some answers... We already addressed questions like "if I was saved, do I need to go church? Are the ten commandments still applicable today? Do we have free will or is our life predestined in advance?"

Moving forward, we will discuss:

- ⇒ Is there a heaven?
- ⇒ Why do bad things happen to good people?
- ⇒ What about death?

Sundays at 9 am live on Facebook!



But Jesus looked at them and said, For "mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

(Matthew 19:26)

THIS WEEK @CHURCH

CHECK OUT OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

During this pandemic, please join Pastor Sabina every week:

Monday:

- Office hours: 1:30 pm to 6:30 pm
- Story time for young and old, live on Facebook: 3:30 pm
- Free hot meal to go: 5 pm

Wednesday:

Devotional time: 3:30 pm

Friday:

Office hours: 12 pm to 6:30 pm
Free hot meal to go: 5 pm

Sunday:

Worship: 9 am

Pastor Sabina is also available any time via email (pastorsabinaterrades@gmail.com) or by phone (508-450-1614).

EXCITING NEWS!



Our own Brandin and Selena will be married in our church on June 20. No worries, there is plenty of space for social distancing in the Sanctuary!!

More details to follow.

YOUR CHURCH NEEDS YOU!

The building may be closed but we still have to pay the bills and prepare for the return of our ministries!

Please keep up with your pledges and donations.

A post from a Tennessee Pastor:

I trust God...and I wear my seatbelt.
I trust God...and I wear a motorcycle helmet.
I trust God...and there are enough life jackets in my boat for everyone on board.
I trust God...and I use oven mitts with really hot dishes.
I trust God...and I lock my house at night.
I trust God...and I have smoke detectors in my house.
I trust God...and I take my prescribed medicines.
I trust God...and I will follow the best guidelines to share the task of flattening the curve.
Acting with caution and wisdom does not indicate a lack of trust in God.

The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



In their 35 years as neighbors on Earth, Arnie and Bart never knew they were both Christians. FUNNY isn't it? *Do your neighbors know what you believe?*

Why Reopening a Church is Different

Planning for the future during COVID-19 presents challenges for the church unlike any other. How will we lead in a time of change?

By Rev. Alex A. Shanks

Everywhere we turn, people are talking about reopening. Should churches simply follow the same guidelines regarding reopening as other institutions? I believe there are practical principles and theological reasons why reopening our church campuses requires a different kind of thinking. The church shouldn't be looking to sidestep the guidelines. The church shouldn't be simply reacting to what others are doing. The church should be leading the way by modeling a method of safety for others to follow.

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

Churches need to open their campuses faithfully, not just safely. Churches will need to consider how the changes required to reopen safely could adversely impact the nature and integrity of worship and ministry. Our expressions of church need to reflect the values and essence of who God has called the church to be. Churches should ask: What are the essential worship elements that express who we are and who we believe God to be, and how can we ensure those are done authentically in this new model? Figuring out how to faithfully do ministry in a world of social distancing while maintaining virtual church options for those who can't attend in person, will require a new wave of ingenuity and adaptation. *Some churches may choose to reopen their church campuses much later in order to open faithfully.*

Churches are built primarily on trust. People don't regularly attend a church where they don't trust their leaders to make healthy and informed decisions. If you lose the trust of your congregation during a reopening of your campus, you lose an essential glue that holds the organizational life together. One can only imagine the impact of losing the trust of the general public by being the next tragic headline. You may be concerned about people going to the church next door who is opening sooner than you are. *In the long run, people will attend churches based on trust and a feeling of safety, rather than when they reopened.*

Church finances should not be a primary consideration in the timing of reopening.

Reopening the church campus does not mean giving will increase. Giving may or may not increase. Churches are not like businesses that had no recent income. Many churches have gained new giving units through online sources. Be skeptical of those who think reopening a church building will solve financial issues. Giving levels may be more impacted by the unemployment rates and the re-prioritization of family budgets in an uncertain time. If your church is fragile financially, reopening is not likely a solution – especially considering the costs related to reopening buildings safely. *Giving will more likely increase as we make faithful decisions.*

Reopening churches will require the building of a new culture. Churches are notoriously ineffective at getting people to follow new rules and guidelines. Even when we do, we always have an exception (picture the person in your family who continues to do things the way they have always done them despite all your efforts to change their habits!). Churches lack an enforcement mechanism and are often too kind for our own good. We need a new culture marked by a willingness to put the safety of others ahead of our personal preferences. We need people willing to call someone out in love when they see a new protocol slipping. The pastor cannot be expected to be the sole guardian of safety. Safely reopening will only be possible through a mass commitment to new norms and a culture that is constantly asking: “How can we help not make someone else sick?” *Reopening will require training a cadre of leaders who will champion a new culture of doing church.*

We can't return to the church as it used to be.

This is not possible. Nor is it responsible. To return to the exact same church we left mid-March would not honor the learnings we have gained and the ways we have adapted. Returning to the way things used to be would fly in the face of the Jesus who warned against pouring new wine into old wineskins. We are creatures of habit and averse to change, so we will have to make every effort to create a new model of church. How will we welcome and engage the new people with whom we have connected? How will we incorporate new technologies? Additionally, how will we honor and give space to express the incredible loss and grief experienced in this time? To return to church without acknowledging the grief and loss of this time would be the worst kind of denial in the very place that should be modeling healthy grief work. We all want to go back to church, but we cannot go back to the same church we left. *Instead of returning to the same church, we should be relaunched as a new church!*

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A church is not primarily a building. The church is a people on mission together. Unlike others, churches have not been closed; rather we are

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preparing to reenter our buildings. In this time, we have been the church gathered virtually and distributed in service and mission. There is no theological congruence to the way God designed the church if our next steps to being the church are focused only on reopening our facilities. There are a variety of ways to connect to God and our neighbors prior to the reopening of our buildings. *We should remain focused on being the church and not just having church worship and ministries on campus.*

The body of Christ must honor the most vulnerable parts of the body as much as any other (1 Corinthians 12).

In many ways, we are called to honor the vulnerable above all others. What does it say theologically about us if we open in a way that excludes the vulnerable? How do we need to adapt when it is the clergy person who is vulnerable? Didn't we read somewhere about the first shall be last and the last shall be first? In this season, what does it mean to be, as Charles Wesley wrote in his hymn, “united by your grace”?

Christ's primary call is to serve others – especially the vulnerable, the weak, and the poor. Our reopening plans are not about what is best for the management of our institution, but what is best for the common good and greater community. *This is not a time to focus primarily on what we may be sacrificing by not gathering, but how we are serving and loving all our neighbors by not gathering too soon.*

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SO WHAT DO WE DO FROM HERE?

Whatever we do, **churches should seek to exceed the basic health guidelines.** Churches are not the exception. By understanding all the ways the virus is still spreading, churches can take appropriate steps to mitigate risk. This includes following all the best guidance around limiting the size of gatherings, cleaning practices, social distancing, and the wearing of masks. The church will need to alter elements of worship like receiving communion, collecting the offering, the greeting time, and public singing. (Note: You can find the latest guidance on all the practical things to consider in reopening UMC campuses in Florida [here](#)). Any church, regardless of size and location, can reopen safely and faithfully if it will thoughtfully take its time, adapt and innovate.

Here are five things to keep in mind as you make your plans to reopen:

Build a healthy church team to do the careful work around reentering your buildings and relaunching ministry and worship. Include people who will see your blind spots. Be sure the team addresses what you will do when people ignore the guidelines, or you learn of a possible infection in your faith community.

Learn as much as you can about the science of how the virus spreads. If all you read is the guidelines, that is all you will be able to follow. If you begin to understand the science, it will push you to exceed guidelines and see the dangers unique to your context. Continue to look for best practices that you can implement in your church setting.

Communicate clearly and often. Plan for the people and circumstances who will need you to communicate even more clearly and more often. Be prepared to clearly articulate the guidelines and answer the question of “why we are reopening our buildings at this time.” Use stories and visuals wherever possible. Helpful communication increases trust.

Go slow. This is not a race to reopen. Give space for thoughtful reflection on your values. Consider how much time it will really take to carefully prepare your space and train your team.

Keep the faith. You won’t think of everything. You can’t. But you do serve a God who is with you now and is calling you into this new reality with hope and confidence. Our ultimate faith is in a God who is able to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3). God will guide us as we make space to truly hear, individually and corporately, from the God who is faithful – no matter when we are able to reopen.

As we reopen our buildings, may we seek to be in God’s time and not our own. We follow a God of hope and resurrection who knows all about making all things new (Isaiah 43:18). That is where our ultimate faith lies. Remember, the church has never closed. The church remains open, even as we don’t physically gather in our building. We do all of this so that we might fully love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31).

Rev. Alex A. Shanks serves as the Assistant to Bishop Ken Carter of The Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.



The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



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Sundays 9 am: Live worship on Facebook

Mondays:

3:30 pm: Story time live on Facebook
5 pm: Free meal

Wednesdays: 3:30 pm: Devotional live on Facebook

Fridays: 5:00 pm Free meal