

Beloved People of Peace,

In one of my first letters to you during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, I anticipated being able to return quickly to worship in the sanctuary, all together, celebrating our reunion. It has become more clear over the past few months that **returning to church will have to happen in phases, beginning with small group gatherings.** Next week, you'll receive our much-anticipated summer newsletter, which will lay out the ways in which Peace UMC plans to be the church during this season.

I'll be honest - it's been a difficult season. Sifting through the huge variety of information as we watch scientific discoveries happen in real time has made it difficult to have a clear view of the future. But one thing is certain: the future we will find ourselves in depends not only on the behavior of the virus, but on the actions of people - as individuals, churches, communities, and governments. The way forward will not be a matter of following a timetable (as much as I wish it were), but of faithfully discerning the signs of the times, and responding accordingly. It has always been that way for the church. Lately, I've been meditating on the honesty in Psalm 13: "*How long, O Lord?*

*Will you forget me forever?...*"

But notice how it ends:

*"I have trusted in your faithful love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*

*Yes, I will sing to the Lord,  
For God has been good to me."*

Our summer newsletter includes protocol for gathering in-person in our church building. As you'll read, **we hope to be able to host occasional small groups that have not been meeting online** when the Wisconsin Department of Health Services announces we have met all the benchmarks for Phase 2, which we anticipate to come sometime in July. **At this point, we do not plan to be able to worship in our building until the early fall - or more specifically, as we enter Phase 3 of the DHS benchmarks.** More information about church in Phase 3 will be announced based on

updated CDC and Annual Conference guidelines when we are closer to that time.

Please understand: for at least the next year, we anticipate our lives to be shaped by the timeline set by COVID-19 and the work of the scientific and medical community. We face difficult choices between conflicting needs. As our task force gathered for the past 6 weeks - out of a deep love for our community, our well-being, and our spiritual development, we consulted public health experts, church leaders, and business owners as we discerned what was the best way forward for the People of Peace. **I want to especially thank Debbie Briggs, Linda Carlson, Rev. Susan Haller, Mary Millard, Becky Mitchell, and Eric Skogg for the work they've done and continue to do on the taskforce. You have lived into our mission, "Caring for Community," through your good work.**

We pray for a spirit of discernment, for wisdom, and patience. We pray for researchers and medical professionals; for the planners; for the ill and recovering; for those grieving and struggling with the weightiness of these times. We pray for the watchers and wonderers, and all those who wait upon the Lord.

May the Holy One: God who Created us, Christ who redeems our shortcomings, and the Spirit who loves us into abundant life, be with us during this time.

Peace,

Rev. Allie