



UNIVERSITY REFORMED CHURCH
Glorifying Christ. Growing in Grace

May 14, 2020

To the saints at URC,

The Elders (Session) of University Reformed Church have labored with much prayer and discussion as to when we should resume in-person corporate worship services as a church. As a result of this lengthy process, the Session has approved a **4 phase plan**. It is generally provided below. We remain committed to the health and safety of our congregants, as well as the greater public's health. We have sought to obey the governing authorities throughout this process and will continue to do so as long as we don't find ourselves out of accord with the Word of God. We are also fully committed to the calling of a local church to gather in corporate worship for the good of its members, the community, and the glory of God. This is also necessary.

Therefore, our current plan is to carefully, with thorough safety precautions, begin limited in-person services on **Sunday, June 14th**. We believe that we can do so responsibly and in accordance with the current recommendations provided by the State of Michigan and CDC for churches. We also recognize that this situation changes weekly, so we present this plan loosely, knowing a need may arise to revisit it before June 14th.

What will this look like?

We are currently in the 1st phase of the plan, but starting on June 14th, we will move to the 2nd phase. In this phase, we will continue to livestream the services but also hold **multiple smaller services** throughout Sunday. An online registration will be provided as we ask congregants comfortable with attending at this time to reserve a spot at one of these services. The process for this will be communicated in the coming weeks. There will be a cap instituted for the maximum number of people in the building for each service. The cap will start out low (on the 14th) and hopefully will increase throughout the summer in accordance with congregational needs and safety recommendations. Accordingly, the number of services offered will start out higher and reduce until we are back to our usual three services. We will also disinfect aggressively between services. Information regarding our detailed procedures and precautions to do so will be sent to the congregation in the days and weeks ahead.

Who should come?

Only those who are healthy and comfortable with attending in-person corporate worship should consider coming at this time. To be clear, we intend to keep the livestream available until this season passes.

Stay at home if you or a member of your household is symptomatic, have a fever, have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, or have traveled internationally or to a domestic hot spot in the prior two weeks.

Our immunocompromised congregants and older individuals should consider worshipping from home. We would also ask families with small children to consider carefully whether they should attend with the social distancing guidelines in place.

In addition, we understand that some will not feel comfortable joining in-person corporate worship services at this time. That is understandable and we don't want any to violate their conscience. These are unique times. It should be noted that some of the elders on the Session will not be attending these early phase services. This is not because they view worship as less important, but because in their estimation it will not be safest for them to attend. Freedom of conscience and extending grace towards others is especially important to uphold and pursue in our current circumstances.

What are the expectations for those in attendance?

We will expect our attendees to adhere to social distancing guidelines while they are in the church building (e.g. keeping a six foot distance between households, washing hands, and wearing a mask or cloth face covering is strongly encouraged for those who are able).

No Sunday school, childcare, or nursery will be provided during this time. We will also not have coffee, snacks, bulletins, offering plates, or Bibles and hymnals available.

Some things, however, are non-negotiable for URC worship services: we will have children in the service with us, we will observe the Lord's Supper when the Elders appoint the Sunday, and we will sing together.

A caution

Even while taking precautions, we recognize there is only so much control we will have or desire to exercise over individual behavior in the building. We are providing direction, and church officers and staff will strive to be an example of safe interactions within the building, but those who attend in-person services will need to be comfortable with possible uncertainties.

The life of the church

Corporate worship is essential in the life of the church, thus we are making it our priority. We treasure the other ministries of our church and remain hopeful that the summer months will bring more safety in terms of gathering in groups and clarity in terms of other URC ministries beginning again.

Finally, we also strongly urge you to give the judgement of charity when it comes to all matters related to COVID-19 and “re-opening”. Think the best of your brothers and sisters, especially those who decide differently on when it is right to start attending in-person worship. We all desire to give glory to Christ, love our neighbor, value worship, and care about human life. Furthermore, we are united by the same Lord, faith, and baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Keep loving each other well. As our Lord said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Let us continue to shine His light before the world.

With love and much prayer,

Brad Beals
Sean Duffy
Gerry Gothro
Jason Helopoulos
Tim Herwaldt
David Hinkley
Allan Knapp

Scott Lawton
Dan Lohrmann
Peeter Lukas
Jeff McAlvey
Tim McCormick
Barry Peterson

Principles, Preface, and Phases for Restarting Corporate Worship

Principles

1. **Glorify** the Lord and Honor His Word (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:5; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 10:31; Exod 19:5; Rev 14:12)
2. **Love** our neighbors (Matt 22:39; Phil 2:3; James 2:8)
3. **Uphold** the importance of gathered corporate worship (Heb 10:25; Acts 2:42-27; Col 3:16; Ps. 122:1)
4. **Honor** and seek to cooperate with government recommendations (Rom 12:18; 13:1-7; Jer 29:7; John 13:35; 1 Peter 2:17)
5. **Respect** the conscience of brothers and sisters (1 Tim 1:5; Rom 14:5, 13; James 4:17)
6. **Humility** as we don't know what we don't know, so any of the phases may be adjusted, supplemented, returned to, or by-passed (James 4:13-15)

Preface

- Preface: The Session of URC encourages the following:
 - Immunocompromised congregants and older individuals should stay home and livestream the service until the threat of Covid-19 has mitigated to an appropriately comfortable level.
 - Any congregants not yet comfortable with gathering in person due to COVID-19 should livestream the service for the time being.
 - We recognize some things will need to change for us to be able to worship in person (e.g. how we do communion, offering, children's ministry, etc.), but some things must not change (e.g. singing in worship, children in worship, etc.).

4 Phase Plan

- **Phase 1 - Livestream Only**
 - Livestream, worship from home
- **Phase 2 - Multiple Smaller In-Person Services (following social distancing guidelines) & Livestream**
 - Up to 5 Sunday services (all the same service)
 - Precautions Implemented (including, but not limited to)
 - Shorter services

- Limited numbers
 - Online signup for service times
 - Livestream the 10:00 a.m.
 - Masks and hand sanitizers available
 - Social distancing in sanctuary (including worship team)
 - Available seating designated
 - Congregants encouraged to keep 6 feet distance
 - Congregants encouraged to wear masks
 - Parents encouraged to use good judgment in bringing young children
 - Lord's Supper with self-contained pre-packaged wafers & juice
 - Childcare and nursery not provided
 - Coffee/Snacks discontinued
 - Bulletins, passing offering plates, friendship books, etc. discontinued
 - Clean sanctuary thoroughly in-between services

- **Phase 3 - Larger In-Person Services & Livestream**
 - Services incrementally increased in size as number of services decreased until eventually return to the normal 2 or 3 Sunday services
 - Precautions continued TBD

- **Phase 4 - New Normal**
 - Sunday morning child care and Sunday School returns
 - All URC activities and hosted activities with childcare resumes
 - Precautions continued TBD