



UNIVERSITY REFORMED CHURCH
Glorifying Christ. Growing in Grace

November 19, 2020

To the saints at URC,

The Session of University Reformed Church wrote to you in May regarding the resumption of in-person corporate worship services. We outlined several guiding principles, including: glorifying the Lord and honoring His Word, loving our neighbors, upholding the importance of corporate worship, honoring and seeking to cooperate with government recommendations, respect for the conscience of brothers and sisters, and humility regarding our plans.

We must begin by praising God for his merciful protection over these last nine months, particularly as He has allowed us to gather together on Sunday mornings and evenings to hear the Word preached and return to the Lord's table. Visitors are coming to URC, including college students and international scholars, and alongside our members they are hearing the gospel preached, being discipled, and growing in the knowledge of Christ. In fact, we have witnessed a handful coming to saving faith. This is cause for much rejoicing!

We are thankful that for several months, hospitalizations and deaths in Michigan overall, and Ingham County in particular, remained fairly low, even as COVID-19 cases increased. Unfortunately, we are now seeing a sustained rise in hospitalizations related to COVID-19 in Michigan, including Ingham County, and communication from hospital administrations that there could be a strain on health care systems. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services order which took effect Wednesday was issued in response to this change. We are thankful that our worship services remain exempt from the restrictions and penalties outlined in the order. While not a requirement, the Session continues to believe that attempting to limit Coronavirus exposure and reduce spread is a way to show love to our neighbors and demonstrate care for the most at-risk members of our own congregation (Galatians 6:10).

For this reason, we write with several reminders and encouragements:

- We have a comprehensive COVID-19 strategy in place including socially distant seating, reduced service lengths, cleaning protocols, and adjustments to the HVAC system.
- Please wear a mask if you're able (the 8:30 service will maintain "mask required" and the 10:00 and 11:30 services "masks encouraged"), particularly when close contact is unavoidable, such as entering and exiting the building.
- We encourage you to promptly exit the building at the end of the service and find an area away from the main entrance for fellowship. It's also really important that we seek to be careful to social distance even as we're fellowshiping outside.
- Thank you for not coming to services when you have fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other symptoms, or a known recent exposure to someone with COVID-19.

These are practical ways that we can honor and encourage one another and allow for continued corporate worship (1 Cor. 12:22-25, Hebrews 10:24-25).

Above all, we encourage you to pray. Pray for God's protection over our bodies and souls. Pray for the vulnerable in our congregation and community. Pray for believers to live lives boldly declaring the truth of the gospel. Pray for those involved in providing medical care and those making difficult policy decisions.

Though we have many reasons to rejoice and be encouraged (many!), we are saddened to witness the divisive political and social climate of our culture impacting some relationships in our church. Beloved, let this not be so! There are myriad valid concerns regarding protection from COVID-19, the harms of government imposition, witness to community, and liberty. Let's strive to be charitable in our interactions in person and online, not destroying our brother or sister for whom Christ died, but be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). We encourage you to review our [Relational Commitment Booklet](#), particularly the section on Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation.

In his book *Bloodlines*, which we are reading as a Session, John Piper writes: "The church is the assembly of those in whom the gospel has taken root. Therefore, it is the group where the reconciling power of the gospel will be seen — or not." He is speaking about race and ethnicity, but the application to COVID-19 is the same. We're living in a world that encourages division at every step. How we respond is a testimony to a watching world. Let us aim to walk in love, pursuing what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding (Romans 14, James 3:17-18). Remember the familiar but challenging words of Christ: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

We are encouraged by your faith, your commitment to worship, and your love of fellowship. As we face this trial together, let us remember that there will be a day soon where the coronavirus will no longer mark our lives. We must strive for the peace and purity of the church, so that the faithful ministry of URC can be maintained for generations to come, being marked by love, harmony, and peace (Col 3:12-17). And let us look to Christ, whose reign and promised return grants us hope in all circumstances.

With love,

Brad Beals
Jason Helopoulos
Tim Herwaldt
David Hinkley
Allan Knapp
Peeter Lukas
Jeff McAlvey

Tim McCormick
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Barry Peterson
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