

## Minister's Article

### ***"Opening Our Doors"***

As has been announced during the last two online worship services, Central's church leadership is working on procedures that will allow us to "open our doors" to in-person gatherings beyond what is currently happening. Since mid-March only essential personnel (both staff and volunteers) have been accessing the building. We recognize there is great desire to move forward and open our doors wider, a desire made all the greater by the Governor's decision to allow more businesses to open this past weekend. Additionally, the governor has allowed that in-person worship is now permissible, though this was accompanied by some suggested guidelines for modified procedures to help ensure social distancing. I want to take this opportunity to share what the church leadership is thinking when it comes to "opening our doors."

Above all, we are guided by the desire to be safe – where "safety" is understood as care and concern for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:31). We also understand that every aspect of how this pandemic is perceived is saturated with the political division that has plagued our country for far too long. But we seek a plan that is as *a*-political as possible. We furthermore believe that there is value in honoring the great desire you have expressed to be in one another's company again. Your pastoral staff surely wants you to know that it misses you as well. Yet we do not want this desire – important as it is – to overshadow the need to keep one another safe.

This means that our interaction with one another in the building when we initially come back will not look like what it did prior to March 22. There will be new procedures to follow for entering the building and how and where to move throughout the building. These procedures are being informed by a team of church members who are also professionals in the science and/or medical fields; recommendations by our regional church; and guidelines proposed by our insurance provider. Our ministers are also in conversation with other clergy in the area, though Central's plan for coming back will be our own. We understand that every congregation is unique and therefore its plan for coming back should reflect that uniqueness.

Some of what makes Central unique are our three (3) distinct worshipping services and our building layout. Our plan must account for things like entering the building, traffic flow within the building, seating within rooms that accommodate social distancing and the ability to clean adequately before and after individuals (groups) use parts of the building. From the onset of the pandemic, we have acknowledged that this is an ever-changing situation. We want you to know that our "coming back" to being an in-person community will be gradual. In all likelihood, we will publicize a list of procedures that will themselves be transitional, until we begin a next phase of coming back. Just because we will begin with a certain set of guidelines does not necessarily mean that they will be permanent. Above all, we do not want to take steps backward. We want to be careful in our coming back so that we are not contributing either to your personal compromised health or to the reason why our state goes back into self-quarantine.

As a Disciple pastor friend of mine recently posted, “We all get to choose what we regret.” Our leadership is choosing to be better safe than sorry and in doing so we believe there is less likelihood we will have grave regrets in the future.

There is no point in going into great detail here about the particulars of the proposal the leadership is considering, but some of the highlights include the following:

- A plan for what to do if someone who has been in the building contracts the virus;
- Allowing small groups (of under 10) – committees, bible studies, etc... - to hold their gatherings at the church;
- Offering an opportunity for individuals, couples and/or family units to have personal prayer and vigil time in the sanctuary or downstairs worship space.
- Limiting the parts of the building that can be used so as to allow for easier cleaning;
- Check-in procedures (some of which are already in place for those currently accessing the building) which include:
  - o A sign recommending those of over a certain age and/or those experiencing health difficulties not enter the building;
  - o Signing in and washing hands;
  - o Showing proof of mask (with one being provided if necessary)

Finally, integral to whatever plan we promote is the continuation of online worship. We do not want those who are not able to come back physically – either due to personal choice or reasons beyond their control – to feel less a part of our community. Every person who helps make up our Central family is important and we do not want to lose sight of that.

If there are any questions, I know that our president Gregg Foltz ([g55foltz@gmail.com](mailto:g55foltz@gmail.com)) and vice-president Brett Swallow ([Brett.Swallow@hickorypointbank.com](mailto:Brett.Swallow@hickorypointbank.com)) would not mind your contacting them with comments and/or questions. Nor, of course, would I ([mkarunas@cccdisciples.org](mailto:mkarunas@cccdisciples.org)). In the meantime, thank you for your continued patience and support.

Blessings... Michael