May 31, 2020

Dear members of the Sheffield and West Fork United Methodist Churches,

On behalf of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), I would like to let you know that we met on Wednesday night, May 20th, to discuss the process of reopening our churches.

As you know, at the recommendation of the Bishop, Iowa United Methodist Churches are closed until June 1st, at which time she will review her decision. Pastor Shannon feels that the Bishop will probably allow churches to gradually reopen, but with specific guidelines to minimize the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. For example, congregation members will be required to wear masks, there will be no singing, no hymnals or Bibles in the pews, no food or refreshments served following the services, maintaining physical distancing between families during worship, to name a few. So the worship service that we are used to will be different during this initial phase of reopening. Also both churches must be thoroughly cleaned before we reopen, and then cleaned after each service. Eventually when the COVID-19 virus is contained, churches will be able to return to full activity without restrictions.

The members of SPRC discussed the pros and cons of reopening at the beginning of June at length. We have received feedback from some of the congregation that would like to open right away, others that would like to wait. Of concern to the committee is that many members of both congregations are in a higher risk group of being over age 60 and having underlying health conditions. It was also brought up that we don’t know how the recent lifting of restrictions for restaurants, hair salons, etcetera, will have on the number of COVID-19 cases in our area. We probably won’t know the impact for several weeks.

Although this was a difficult decision, because we know how important worship and fellowship are to everyone, SPRC has decided to not open the churches for services in early June. We will meet again on June 17th to reassess the situation. In the meantime, the process of thoroughly cleaning both churches in preparation for reopening will begin in June, so that we are ready when we do decide resume in-church services.

We would really like your feedback. Please contact any of the SPRC members listed below. Also Pastor Shannon has a survey at the church website that you can fill out.

God’s blessings to you all,

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