

June 11, 2020

Sisters and Brothers,

While Onalaska United Methodist Church has remained active throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – offering online worship and ongoing programs, missions, and outreach – we have kept our building closed to protect our members and community. We often hear, “When do you plan to re-open the church for in-person worship and meetings?”

Our COVID-19 Team is looking at guidance from many sources. Our priority remains the safety of all our members, especially the most vulnerable, remembering that Jesus said, “as we do it for the least of these, we do it for him.” We have developed a detailed Operational Safety Plan to guide us (<http://onalaskaumc.org/covid-19/>).

We can't set arbitrary dates for re-opening. Instead, we will open in phases tied to public health milestones measured by the La Crosse County Health Department's "Compass." When the Compass moves to a lower risk level for at least two weeks, our COVID-19 Team will let church leaders know we can plan for the next phase of opening. If the risk level goes up, we will quickly revert to a more secure phase. We will update you via eNews and our website. Check the compass and read more at <https://lacrossecounty.org/covid19compass> (pull down the region menu and choose La Crosse).



SEVERE RISK - Phase Zero

- Building closed for all except most essential functions.
- No in-person groups or meetings.
- Weekly worship by livestream with 9 or fewer people onsite to lead service.

HIGH RISK - Phase One

- Small groups of up to 15 indoors and 50 outdoors may meet, at the leader's discretion, if following our Operational Safety Plan (health checks, masking, social distancing, thorough cleaning, etc.)
- Weekly worship by livestream with 15 or fewer people onsite to lead service.

MODERATE RISK - Phase Two

- Small groups of up to 50 indoors and 100 outdoors may meet, at the leader's discretion, if following our Operational Safety Plan. Rooms will be marked for maximum safe occupancy.
- Special worship services (funerals, weddings, etc.) may take place with 50 or fewer people if following the Operational Safety Plan.
- Weekly worship will continue by livestream only, with 15 or fewer people onsite to lead service in order to follow safety protocols necessary to protect our staff and congregation members.

LOW RISK - Phase Three

- Some parts of the Operational Safety Plan can be relaxed.
- Small groups of up to 100 indoors and 200 outdoors may meet with reasonable precautions.
- Weekly in-person worship with up to 100 people may begin, with livestreaming offered for those who prefer to remain safe at home.

What does the future look like? We don't know what or when the “new normal” after the pandemic will be. But Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow - we can trust God's promise of a bright, hopeful future.

In the meantime, we are making creative plans for the best ministry we can do now. We continue to improve our livestream worship. We will host a drive-through, virtual vacation bible school. The youth will stay active this summer. Our community dinner is more important than ever. We have creative and relevant small groups planned that can meet on Zoom or in person as conditions allow. Our Stephen Ministers continue to offer caring ministry to our members. And if the risk level drops to moderate this summer, we plan to have an outdoor worship service and picnic.

We know you have questions. Email us with the subject “COVID Q&A” to office@onalaskaumc.org and we'll answer them as best we can. Or, check the COVID-19 resource page on our website. Stay safe and stay blessed!

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