

January 19, 2021

Friends,

The world, and our congregation, continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as the new year begins. It's been nine months since we've been able to worship together in our sanctuary. The good news is that worship, mission, and discipleship have continued at Onalaska UMC throughout the pandemic. The GREAT news is that hope is on the horizon as the vaccine roll-out begins. Here are some updates...

How is OUMC handling the pandemic? We are protecting our congregation and community while still engaging in meaningful ministry. Through hard, creative work by staff and volunteers, most of our programs are online. Rhonda Akesson and volunteers are conducting a new round of Random Chats of Care phone calls with members. Our outreach, especially feeding our community, has never been stronger or more meaningful.

Our safety protocols are working (<http://www.onalaskaumc.org/covid-19/>). No one has contracted COVID-19 because of exposure at church. Nonetheless, our congregation is affected. We are aware of one COVID-related death in our church family, and many members and friends who have been sick, some seriously.

Financially, OUMC is hard hit by the pandemic. Our 2021 budget anticipates about \$70,000 less income (roughly 19% lower than usual). We are tightening our belts, including temporarily laying off some staff members who are unable to work during the pandemic. But thanks to your generosity, we'll make it through.

How is our community handling the pandemic? Mark Beahm, a doctor at Mayo Clinic and chair of our church's COVID team, reports that La Crosse has plenty of vaccine supply and is making rapid progress inoculating medical staff and essential workers. He received his first dose and experienced a sore arm for a few days, but no other symptoms. We encourage everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they can, and in the meantime to stay home as much as possible, continue wearing masks, and practice safe distancing.

If you are concerned about exposure or think you might be sick, please get tested. There are several options, but UW-La Crosse is offering free community testing (<https://www.uwlax.edu/info/covid-19/testing/>) with results in 20 minutes or so.

When can we return to in-person worship and events? At this time, OUMC's COVID team recommends that we don't return to regular weekly indoor worship. We are following local health department and medical system best practices. Until enough people have been vaccinated and the infection rate in La Crosse County goes down, we don't want to host large group events that might harm our members or community.

We will continue to look for special opportunities where we can safely see each other, such as a drive-through Ash Wednesday service mid-February. Watch the eNews and our website for details and opportunities. By spring we hope to have outdoor worship again, and perhaps by summer we can re-open the sanctuary.

How can we help each other? Paul writes, "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:9). Friends, we are in the home stretch. Pray. Call your friends. Volunteer. Go for a walk. Worship with us (<http://youtube.onalaskaumc.org/>). Be encouraged! Call if you'd like Pastor Park to visit, or if you have an idea to help others. Thanks, and God bless!



Wes Panzer,
Council Chair



Megan Barbian, RN,
Lay Leader



Becky Barnes,
Stephen Leader



Mark Beahm, MD,
COVID-19 Team



Rev. M. Park Hunter
Pastor

Not on the internet? Call us (608-783-3380) and ask for our weekly mailing with news and worship materials.