**BURNT FACTORY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

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**RETURN TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES and WHAT TO TEMPORARILY EXPECT**

*“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”* 1 Peter 5: 10-11

The HCT (Healthy Church Team) has been discerning, praying, and working toward re-entry plans for “in-person” worship at Burnt Factory UMC. The team had hoped that a stage 3 plan would be forth coming from our Bishop by now, but with pandemic numbers rising, it seems unlikely we will receive any updated protocols in the near future. I want to remind the congregation that the stages I am referencing are denominational and not governmental. We align with our Bishop and not the governor in regard to church policies and practices.

It has always been the goal of the HCT and our Virginia Annual Conference to keep our congregation as safe as possible. We have been patient regarding re-entry plans because the pandemic has created the need for safety protocols that are difficult (not impossible) to navigate for larger churches. The HCT also believed that the restrictive nature of the plans could unintentionally create a harmful environment, therefore going against the mission of the church. Under the original stage 2 plan, attendance would have been limited to just 50 people per service. The HCT and your pastor believed this to be unworkable. Since then, our Bishop has been working with established and trusted scientific authorities as well as our Governor and state resources. It has been determined that the denomination will now embrace a protocol that establishes 50% of our church occupancy rate to be the rule. The HCT believes this change makes it possible for BFUMC to return to “in-person” worship, even though mandatory social distancing still presents us with number challenges.

The return to “in-person” worship would require the temporary denominational “*standard of practices”* be instituted as found in the Technical Assistance Manuel (TAM). These “*standards of practice”* are to be upheld and exercised without exception. The TAM is the denominational guide to re-entry protocols and practices for the local church. It is binding on all Virginia United Methodist Churches and pastors.

**WHAT TO TEMPORARILY EXPECT WHEN RETURNING**

*“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*  Romans 12:12

In summarizing the protocols in the TAM and for BFUMC to re-institute “in-person” worship, the following temporary practices would need to be followed without exception, special circumstance, or adaptation.

* Face coverings are mandatory for all people attending all services. The pastor must preach with a face covering.
* Social distancing is mandatory. Families that live together can sit together while others will keep a 6-foot separation.
  + To comply with this, BFUMC will add an additional service for the purpose of spreading out our numbers. We will offer an 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00 worship service. If we find our numbers do not support additional services, we will return to the 8:30 and 11:00 models.
  + **Attendees are to notify the church regarding which worship service they will attend.** Please call, e-mail, text Rob Moss or Pastor Steve. It is critical to know how many to expect at each service.
* Answering 4 health related questions before entering the church is mandatory.
* Staying home when sick is mandatory.
* Attendees are to avoid gathering and touching.

Following is a partial list of other temporary requirements that the church will need to follow regarding the worship service. I know the following is difficult. I pray that these restrictions will be very temporary!

* We will not be allowed to participate in congregational singing or to have choir performances or any solo or group performances.
* We will not be allowed to serve food or drink.
* We will not be allowed to have present in the service any printed materials.
* We will have nursery (6 and under) available at our 9:30 and 11:00 services.
  + A detailed protocol for parents will be available describing the specific practices.
  + There will be no Children’s Church offered at this time.
* We will institute cleaning between services regarding the high touch areas of the facility.
* Offering plates will no longer be passed but provided at the conclusion of each service.
* Holy Communion is sacred and must be administered in reverence. The protocol in the TAM for celebrating this wonderful sacrament, in the judgment of your pastor and HCT, leaves much to be desired and as the protocols are faithfully and appropriately arrived at, we will still refrain, at this time, in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

Having shared all of this, I believe, if we implement Stage 2, that we can still enjoy a meaningful worship experience! I believe we can overcome and celebrate because the Lord will be with us! When God’s people gather with love for the Lord in their hearts, God will be there, God will provide and God will make a way!

I do not hold any affection for these restrictions, but they are necessary, as we all fight this terrible disease! If these protocols will keep everyone reasonably safe and if this will get us back together, then perhaps, we need to covenant together to comply. If we decide to move forward with this, we will be asking each and every one of you that call BFUMC home, to pour out grace and be amendable to these temporary protocols. Without full compliance this will not work and in fact, will lead to cancellation of services.

Let me be clear about this next point. It is not our goal to suggest in the least for anyone to attend “in-person” services who do not feel safe or comfortable. We will still provide weekly streaming services. We encourage anyone who is at risk to stay home and continue to participate in the life of the church by watching our streaming service and by participating in the faith community in other various capacities.

We come to worship Jesus Christ and know in our hearts and affirm in our spirits the wonderful truth of what Jesus promised!

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

IN SUMMARY

Friends, we will announce the date for re-opening for services very soon and will offer three services: 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00.

We will offer nursery for 6 and under at 9:30 and 11:00.

It is very important you let the church know if you plan to attend and at which service. We will need to provide adequate space for social distancing reasons.

Please wear a face covering, social distance, answer the 4 medical form questions when entering the building, refrain from contact, and come prepared to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! God bless each and every one of you and as we continue to journey through these stressful and trying times, let us never forget that God loves us!

In Christ’s love,

Pastor Steve, the Staff and the

Healthy Church Team