



The United Church of Big Rapids  
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October 1, 2020

Dear United Church of Big Rapids Family,

**We will be gathering once again in the sanctuary in person beginning October 18, 2020!**

What a trying time it has been for us as a body of one as well as each of us individually. The pandemic has separated us yet brought us together in many ways. Through it all, the United Church of Big Rapids' Governing Board has been working diligently to create a plan that provides the support and care that a church typically provides while protecting our staff, membership, and guests from the spread of COVID-19. As time has passed, executive orders have changed, and plans have evolved. Please read below how your Governing Board has determined to move forward together:

**OUR NEW NORMAL**

Coming to into our building looks different than it used to. Whether you are in the building for in-person worship or for a group meeting, we must be cautious about spreading the virus. Church leadership has purchased new sanitation equipment and is in the process of choosing air purification systems to mitigate contamination. Our Re-Engagement Guide will be made available in complete form, but the list below can give you a quick view into our new protocols while joining in person:

- Staff, Commission and committee members, and parishioners must complete a health screening form each time they enter the building.
- Masks will be worn indoor at all times. Virtual accommodations will be made for those not able to wear a mask.
- Meeting attendants will be expected to assist with sanitization by wiping down tables and chairs that have been used with disinfectant wipes before exiting the building. Building space that has been used for meetings of any kind will be sanitized with plant-based disinfectant spray, eliminating the virus on surfaces in a period of 4 minutes. There will also be signage, sanitizer, and barriers up throughout the building that will assist with limiting the opportunity for spread of the virus.

**WORSHIP FORMAT**

We surveyed our church family and membership twice throughout the past several months and have learned that although the majority of us prefer in person worship, there are many of us that are enjoying tuning in to our Sunday services via Facebook and YouTube and will likely continue to do so. What a great opportunity to include our college students, snowbirds, and extended family on a regular basis! Worship will be like what our virtual experience is now in the following ways:

- Attendees must register for attendance (*instruction will be provided soon – this action will assist with controlled group size and swift communication if needed in the event a positive case has been reported*)

- There will be no singing
- There will be no physical contact such as shaking of hands and hugging

We will also be practicing the following:

- Only individually wrapped servings of communion will be provided
- Offering will be placed in a plate at the back of the sanctuary
- Pastor JT will be joining us in the sanctuary at which time he will deliver his sermon and lead prayer.

Because of this insight our surveying has provided, the Governing Board has approved the purchase and installation of a major technology upgrade. These upgrades will provide for better sound, sight, and sharing quality with new recording, camera, and projection equipment. Of course, these upgrades will take time to implement. For now, we will begin with simple live streaming as we did in March. Please be patient as we continue to improve our ability to create a quality worship experience for you virtually. We are moving forward as quickly as we can to get the upgrades installed.

Working within this new framework has brought several opportunities for you to get **involved and serve your church!** Our new technology upgrades will require us to have a small team of volunteers that can help to manage cameras, sounds boards, etc. so please consider joining us as we improve this resource for our remote audience. Usher team responsibilities will evolve and teams will be trained accordingly. And of course, we want to make sure that we are keeping in touch with our *entire* family; please consider helping church leadership communicate this message to our wider audience whether it be to assist with phone calls, or simply sharing within your circle of influence to those seeking a loving Christ-centered community for themselves.

In the coming weeks, our messaging will be shared in many ways. Whether it be Facebook posts, bulletin announcements, newsletter articles, friendly phone calls, or spoken messages during worship, we hope to live into our mission that states we want to *“celebrate all creation as an active presence in our community, engaging in transformational worship and nurturing families and relationships, as we learn to foster more justice and love in ourselves and our community.”* Being active is key. We hope you will continue to join us in the ways you choose but always with Christ’s love in mind.

With true devotion to our family,

Kristina Coby  
Governing Board Moderator