

Belle Fourche & St. Onge UCC Yoked Parish  
717 Jackson Street  
Belle Fourche, SD 57717  
June 23, 2020

Dear church friend/member:

**We have cautiously exciting news for you.** The Church Council for the First Congregational Church UCC in Belle Fourche met yesterday (Monday), and voted to re-start in-person worship beginning July 5<sup>th</sup>. The St. Onge UCC also voted to hold in-person worship beginning July 5<sup>th</sup>. It is exciting because, like you, we dearly miss our time together. eWorship and Zoom meetings are alright, but they can never really replace face to face interaction. We still cautious because by now it should be obvious that the COVID-19 virus is alive and well within the United States, and within South Dakota in particular. The Black Hills region is still facing new cases weekly. So, where does this leave us?

Your Council has been meeting and has considered the options for reopening. **The Council has decided to reopen in-person worship beginning July 5, 2020.** There is an awareness that as we come for worship, we must embody the call of Jesus' teaching to love our neighbors as ourselves. COVID-19 is still a reality and we want to do what we can to protect ourselves and each other. To do this, we will have worship with the following expectations:

- † Facemasks are strongly recommended. Although not always comfortable, it has been shown that facemasks protect those around you...from you. We wear facemasks as a sign of love for those around us.
- † We ask that you use hand sanitizer when entering the sanctuary so that germs will be less likely to collect upon surfaces.
- † We will practice social distancing (at least 6 feet apart, except for those living in the same household). To assist with social distancing, we will close every other pew.
- † We won't have any fellowship gathering in the building before or after the worship services. This includes gatherings outside the church door when leaving worship. It is in such situations that the virus can spread.
- † We will not be able to have congregational singing because it has the possibility of spreading germs many yards.

The Council is aware that not all will welcome these expectations. We understand your feelings, yet these expectations reflect our current world and are our best way of protecting one another as we gather to worship a God who loves all people. We know that even with these expectations there will be those who are not yet comfortable gathering with others for worship. To accommodate those who feel this way, we will continue to record and make worship available on-line.

Your Council is glad to be able to find a way for us to gather and worship our God. We ask for your cooperation. We want to do worship in a way that cares for all.

Yours in Christ,

The Belle Fourche Church Council

Blaine Anderson      Ashley Pearson  
John King              Larry Prager  
Sharon Munyon        Devin Stephens

The St. Onge UCC Church Council