

Dear First UMC Arlington Family,

I cannot tell you how much I miss seeing everyone in person! I am anxiously waiting the day we can worship, study, and spend time together in person. With that said, I am deeply troubled with the current realities of COVID-19 and the recent spike in both confirmed cases and hospitalizations. Many of you may have seen or read the governor's press conference from Monday, June 22 where he and his medical professionals confirmed that we must do things better and more carefully because hospitalizations and cases have doubled between mid-May and mid-June. This was obviously not the news that any of us are hoping for as we want to open up gatherings and worship at First UMC.

From the beginning of this pandemic, our church leadership and staff discussed looking at the numbers as an indicator of when we could move forward and begin in-person gatherings again. In consultation with medical professionals, we have known all along that it would be unwise and even dangerous to consider in-person large gatherings until we see several weeks on decreased case numbers and hospitalizations. I hoped that would be happening by now. Unfortunately, the data is telling us the exact opposite. Hopefully this negative trend turns around very soon and we can still move forward with trying in-person worship as the school year resumes in late August. As frustrating as all of this is, we must put the well-being and safety of our most vulnerable members and guests above our (my) own desire to see one another and be together for worship, study, and service. We must also focus on the amazing work God continues to do through all of this.

I am so thankful that this season has brought out the very best in the amazing congregation that is First UMC Arlington. There are so many acts of service, prayer, learning, and worship that are happening and it is so exciting to see that the church is not a building, but is you the people! To be clear, the church is not closed, you are worshiping, giving, praying, growing, and serving in so many creative and important ways and God is blessing us during this time. In addition, we are so thankful for all of those that have joined our community in worship during this time for the first time or reconnected with us after a long time away. Each week we have new persons worship with us, and we have even had people ask to join our church after finding us during this virtual time of worship and study. We know online-only worship is not ideal, but we have more people hearing the gospel and worshiping with us this way than we typically have in person at our church building. All of that to say, God is still at work and God's love and grace is being shared as much, if



not more, than ever. Our church's staff and leadership still hope that with social distancing, masks, and care, small groups can resume or continue to meet in July and August, and if the infection rate as well as hospitalizations show a downward trend we hope to begin worship when the school year resumes.

As we have said before, we are here for you if there is anything you need during this time. We may not be able to see you in person, but we can talk by phone, pray anywhere at any time, and stay joyfully connected through God's love, grace, and peace that passes our understanding. As scripture says, "Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:8) and science tells us that the good thing to do in order to love and care for one another right now is to be very careful so we do not spread this virus further. Thank you for your patience, your love, your continued generosity, as well as your faithfulness in finding new ways to be disciples of Jesus Christ and the church during COVID-19.

May God bless and keep,
Pastor Chris