

# Murray Presbyterian Church

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Pastor

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It's been a month now since onsite worship gatherings were suspended, and a lot of us can't wait to get back to church! So it may have come as welcome news last Friday when the governor announced that the most restrictive measures in the health directive for our area will be lifted on May 4, allowing churches to re-open for worship as long as certain social distancing requirements are met.

Your Session members share that desire to be back in church! However, at a meeting this week, the Session expressed its unanimous conviction that ***now is not the time to resume public worship***. We will instead continue to offer live-streamed worship services from our sanctuary on Sunday mornings, and are committed to investing in the equipment we need to improve the quality of that online worship experience (both the live-stream video, as well as the audio feed delivered by telephone). We also continue to explore creative ministry initiatives that do not involve in-person gatherings.

In making this determination, the session took various considerations into account. First and foremost, we're vitally concerned for the health and well-being of our congregation members. Some of our most faithful worshippers are people who are in the high risk category for coronavirus complications. Thankfully, we live in a county that has not seen a lot of illnesses to this point (and we obviously want to keep it that way). But we are part of a wider metropolitan area where new cases are accelerating. This factor alone would make it unwise, in our judgment, to resume onsite worship right now.

Secondly, the size and design of our sanctuary would make it very difficult to implement the social distancing requirements. We would be hard pressed to keep every family unit six feet apart and still accommodate more than a small handful of worshippers.

We are also following the direction offered by our presbytery and by our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). In a letter sent to all congregations earlier in the week, our presbytery's leadership team advised "*No in-person worship should be conducted until further guidance is provided.*" In a subsequent Zoom meeting of pastors in our presbytery, we all concurred in this decision. In Iowa, where a similar lifting of restrictions is underway, the top officials from a variety of Christian denominations--Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, UCC, Disciples, Baptist, Mennonite, and Catholic--all issued a joint statement "asking congregations and members across the state to take faithful action by refraining from in-person religious gatherings, including worship." You will no doubt hear of some churches--mostly of the independent variety--who have opted to resume gathered worship. *You should know that mainstream religious communities appear to be **unanimous** in rejecting that option at this time.*

In God's good timing, the day will come when we will all be together again in our beautiful house of worship. Until then, we are convinced that the best way to love one another, love our neighbors, and protect those who are jeopardizing their safety to serve in frontline capacities is by remaining physically apart. May this time of forced separation serve to increase our desire to be in the Lord's house again, once that becomes feasible!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. William J. McConnell, Pastor  
on behalf of the Session of Murray Presbyterian Church