

Dear UALC family,

Have you ever heard anyone say, “We don’t go to church; we ARE the church”? It’s true. The church is not an event or a building. It’s people. *We* are the church. And the church has still been “going” to worship for the past few months, even as our buildings were closed.

Even so, we miss worshipping together in person! I’m writing this letter to help you understand our plans and know what to expect. Here are the basic guidelines we’re using to make decisions:

1. We will honor the best safety and health guidance from public health officials.
2. We will continue to offer excellent online worship and growth opportunities for those who are not ready or able to gather yet at our buildings.
3. We are moving forward in conversation with other large churches in Central Ohio.

But here’s the most important and most Biblical guiding question that we can all ask:

4. How can we love and care for our neighbors?

The book of 1 Corinthians teaches how to use our Christian freedom well (or poorly). And 1 Corinthians 8 is especially relevant. When we are free to act in multiple ways, **Christlike love compels us to make choices that serve and protect the ones who are the most vulnerable.** Many of you are being more careful to avoid COVID exposure for your parents, grandparents, or other loved ones than you would be for just yourself. It’s the Christian thing to do. As a church, we will make our choices to love like Jesus.

On the topic of caring for one another, we are an intergenerational church. We are a community of children, teens, young adults, not-so-young adults (like me), and all the way up the spectrum. Thanks be to God! You can’t find this kind of community just anywhere. But with this complexity also comes the risk of miscommunication. In a previous letter, I encouraged people with higher risks, including seniors, to continue to participate in church activities from home. I’ve heard that some of you felt like the church doesn’t want you anymore. I’m terribly sorry to have given you that impression. Please forgive me. **My dear seniors, please know that you are a valued part of our church. We don’t want you to stay home. We simply want you to be safe because we love you. Please make whatever choice is best for you and your health.** The modern world isn’t an easy place to age. And it’s hard on younger people in different ways. Let’s love each other and bear one another’s burdens.

We are planning to begin **re-gathering for worship in person starting on July 23 and 26.**

Traditional Service - Lytham Road Sanctuary, Thursday evenings, 7 pm, beginning July 23

- **What will this service be like?** This will be a rich, liturgical service, worshipping God in Spirit and Truth with instrumental and special music, communion, prayer, creed and preaching. I wish we could sing hymns, but singing indoors has proven to be quite a dangerous spreader of COVID-19.
- **How will we share communion?** Communion will follow a normal liturgy, and we will use pre-packaged individual elements for now to promote safety.
- **What safety precautions will be used?** We will follow the recommended procedures, including social distancing, facial coverings for indoor events, and appropriate cleaning measures. We won’t share Bibles, hymnals, or printed materials, and we will give our offerings on entry or exit. (Free face coverings will be provided if you need one.)

- **When will we start?** We will worship on Thursday evenings at 7 pm beginning July 23.
- **Why Thursdays?** Based on other churches that have already re-entered for worship, we still expect most of the congregation to continue worshipping online. Moving to Thursday instead of Sunday will be a sacrifice for some, but a benefit for many as it allows us to pre-record the service so that we can begin offering an excellent, online Traditional service on Sunday mornings. We are starting small and still exploring options for a Sunday morning service at Lytham Road.
- **How will we manage attendance?** Because of limited space, we will ask you to register in advance for this service. Registration will be available starting July 13, online at www.ualc.org/worship, or by calling the church office at (614) 451-3736.

Modern Service - Outdoor Lawn at Mill Run, Sunday mornings, 9 am, beginning July 26

- **What will this service be like?** This will be a modern style service drawing on music and formats from Mill Run, Lytham Xalt, and Lytham Celebration.
- **How will we share communion?** Some details are still being finalized, but we are planning to use pre-packaged individual elements for now to promote safety.
- **What safety precautions will be used?** We will create circles on the ground for you to gather with your family or people in your "bubble." We ask that you wear face coverings as you enter and exit, but face coverings will be optional inside your circle. We won't share materials, and cleaning procedures will be followed as needed.
- **When will we start?** We will worship on Sunday mornings at 9 am beginning July 26.
- **Why only 9 am?** We're starting early to avoid the heat of the day, and we believe we have enough capacity at one hour. We will be livestreaming the 9 am service, and the service will also be available online after the broadcast.
- **What if the weather is bad?** In case of inclement weather, we will not worship in person. Please join us online at www.ualc.org/worshiponline. Check for status updates at www.ualc.org.

What about worship online? We will broadcast both our Modern and Traditional services with live hosts at 9 am on Sunday morning. Both services will also continue to be available online after the live broadcast.

How can you help?

First, last, and always, please pray. Pray for wisdom for all of the ministry leaders who are implementing the next steps for our gathered activities. This isn't easy work, so please lift them up in prayer. And please pray for everyone impacted by COVID - medically, socially, financially, or any other way.

Second, you can plan to come and be a part of worship! It will be powerful when we are together in person again.

Third, you may help by staying home and joining us online, especially if you are not feeling well or are in a high-risk group. We love you and miss you and want you to do what's best for you and our church.

We greatly appreciate the grace that you have shown during these difficult times. Thank you for your continued encouragement. God is indeed blessing our church and bringing opportunities for growth that can only come during times of adversity. Let's continue to honor God everywhere and continue our commitment to stay together always.

In Christ,
Pastor Steve