



A Monthly Update in the Life of our Church

JUNE 2020

Contact



O Lord, how many more changes lie ahead? *God is constant amid pandemic, economic pain, and racial strife*

I wish the media would stop saying “the new normal.” I grasp the point, but it belies the reality that change will be more normal than the status quo going forward.

I pray that church folks will accept that our worship, activities, and faith lives may never “return to normal” after the pandemic. Bad news? No!

Because of the continual decline in U.S. church attendance, a total return to past practices is risky.

Can Church Normal Mean Decline?

If “church normal” is good, why has membership, activities and giving declined at Redeemer and mainline denominations?

One source of comfort: Our life changes; God is constant.

It’s not my opinion that counts, but I find more vitality, variety and spirit in the recorded services.

Our Sunday service is also more Christ-centered. How could we not more faithfully turn to our savior in such chaotic times as these?

If Christ is the groom and the church is the bride, our spiritual marriage feels more passionate.

How do we handle the anxiety of not knowing when we can return to the sanctuary to praise God?

Scripture guides us there.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding,” says Proverbs 3:5.

Shorter Is Better in Videos

Worships have run about half or less of the traditional in-person times.

There is a method to my madness there. Because of the cognitive nature of humans, time seems to pass more slowly when watching a video than when sitting in church!

Why? There are far fewer spatial distractions while watching a video, so a 20-minute sermon would seem torturously long. (Hmm, perhaps some of my 8-minute ones do, too?)

For example, did anyone notice that my Pentecost homily was actually less than 5 minutes? And that Mike and Kim are singing much shorter hymn versions? (Just as beautifully, though)

Brevity is not our top goal, but the shorter services seem more passionate, energized and engaging than longer gatherings. I, too, can be more focused on the message, Scripture and Holy Spirit when the clock is ticking faster.

How Engaged Are We Worshipers?

Of course, I won’t be the first or last pastor to note that many worshipers are a passive lot who are resistant to getting engaged or participating in the worship service. (The frozen chosen?)

I realize the old model of church, with the exception of choir members, is inactive congregants listening to active worship leaders. The Bible tells us to get more engaged. John 4:24 says this.

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I know many folks come to church with their heads and hearts abuzz from family events, hurts, strong emotions, problems and distractions.

Yet theologians and psychologists say religious services have the deepest impact on worshipers who move, shift, light candles, bow their heads, clap or even verbally respond.

That is me; is that you?

UCC, of course, and Redeemer, in particular, is open to all. But if our singing, hugging, handshaking, or touching is restricted in a pandemic, how impactful will live worship be?

And, of course, will Redeemer ever rise to serve those outside its four walls? I certainly applaud its hosting support groups and a Chinese church.

But will the faith of the church ever motivate us to become more directly and actively involved in outside ministry – the work Jesus calls us to do. Will we rise to that challenge? Pray into that!

The Rev. Thomas W. Caruso is the interim minister at Church of the Redeemer.



*“A garden requires patient labor and attention. Plants do not grow merely to satisfy ambitions or to fulfill good intentions. They thrive because someone expended effort on them. The glory of **gardening**: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature.”*

<https://brainyquote.com/topic/garden>

United Scrip Gift Card Orders NOW AVAILABLE!

Scrip gift card orders are now being collected and delivered once a month. The schedule through the summer is listed below. Orders are due to the church office on **Wednesdays between 2 and 3PM**. Orders may be picked up or will be mailed the **following Wednesday between 2 and 3PM**. **ALL ORDERS MUST INCLUDE \$2.00 FOR HANDLING TO DEFRAY OUR POSTAGES COSTS.**

Contact the church office at **717-533-7300** or info@redeemerchurchucc.org to receive an order form, or pick one up at the church (found in the labyrinth info box by the side sanctuary door).

Due Dates (Wednesdays) Pickup Dates (Wednesdays)

June 10	-----	June 17
July 15	-----	July 22
August 12	-----	August 19

REMEMBER: ORDERS ARE DUE BY DATES LISTED!



Prayers of Concern and Healing for:

- **Kemmy Himmelberger** for continued health challenges
- **Betsy Baker** who is continuing to recover at home from her stay in the hospital
- **Kathie G.** who was recently diagnosed with cancer

Prayers for the Larger Community for those who serve and protect; for those in government who make decisions that affect our world, our country, our commonwealth, and our communities



Leadership Team Update

By Kim Merkert, Chair



The Leadership Team had an abbreviated meeting on May 21, 2020, complete with 6 feet of distance and masks. Following are updates of our activities.

The majority of our time at the meeting was spent discussing the church's Coronavirus reopening plan. As you can imagine, this effort will require much planning and coordination. We are trying to follow guidance of the CDC, the PA governor, and the UCC conference office. We will need to make sure we can adequately clean the building between usages and obtain the necessary cleaning supplies to do so. We also need to walk through the building and consider what surfaces are cleanable and what items need to be removed. There is also a possibility of more heavily utilizing outdoor gatherings at first. We are just in the very beginning of our planning. Our top priority is being thorough to ensure the safety of our congregation and other groups who use our building. We will continue discussions at our regular June leadership team meeting. At this point, there is a strong possibility that we will not reopen the building during June. We will be sure to update our congregation and outside groups as soon as we have more definitive plans.

Jonathan, our treasurer, reported that we have continued to meet our financial obligations

Leadership Team Chair

during the closure. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of our congregation and community for continuing to send offerings and donations during this time. As you know, even though we are closed, our bills have not stopped. It is truly a team effort for us to continue to operate and ensure our financial health. Thank you for your continued support!

We are pleased to report that we voted to replace the floor in the downstairs men's restroom. The current tiles show definite wear and tear, and some breakage. We believe the new floor will help with the odor problem as well, as we can more adequately clean around the bathroom fixtures. This project is estimated to cost approximately \$1,400. We have funds available from the kindred challenge for this project. We continue to collect donations to the kindred challenge for the purpose of building repairs and maintenance that benefit both our congregation and all the outside groups who use the building. We are hopeful that we can complete this project while the building is still closed.

As you may remember, Redeemer's profile had been completed by the profile committee prior to the building closure. The leadership team voted to accept the profile. Our next step was to present it to the congregation. We had that

meeting scheduled for early March but had to cancel the meeting. We would like to continue with the next steps of the profile, to keep it from being significantly delayed during this time. We are working on a plan to present it to the congregation (possibly through small group meetings at the church, or through a phone/video conference call). In the meantime, we can go ahead and send the completed profile to the conference so they can start working on their review of the document. This is exciting news during what has become a long interim process. We will update you on this process as more information becomes available.

Our church continues to stay connected through phone conversations, daily devotionals, and weekly worship videos. We miss seeing everyone at church for worship. We look forward to the day when we can start meeting again.

Our regular monthly Leadership Team meetings will resume in June. Our next meeting will be held on June 11, the 2nd Thursday of the month, at 7pm. As always, please reach out to the Leadership Team if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Kim Merkert
Leadership Team Chairman



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Empowering the church to demonstrate and declare the courageous love of Christ!

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:1-2)

Pentecost is a day of testimony. Not only testimony, but unity. The experience of the disciples in receiving the Spirit, the preaching of Peter to those gathered, and the conversions and baptisms that followed point to the power and freedom of God. When that power and freedom move through us, we are unbounded and we speak, act, and live in testimony to God's power through Jesus. We come together and we know a holy unity.

Some days, testimony comes easily. We rise and speak to the holiness of our diversity as made in God's image. On other days, the Spirit seems absent and we are left with only our stark humanness – days when we see the very worst that we can be. And we grieve. This past week has held some of those difficult days. The past seven days gave us the statistic of 100,000 deaths due to Covid. The week also gave us the death of a single man – George Floyd - that revealed (again) the sin of racism in America. The former resulted in grief for thousands of people. The latter resulted in grief, outrage, protests, and violence, also for thousands.

Some days the flames of Pentecost seem to be extinguished. Physical flames erupt instead, ignited from despair, anger, and desperation. The wind we hear is not the wind of the Spirit bringing us to unity, repentance, and testimony. Instead of the breath of God falling on believers, we hear the labored breathing of those with Covid and those who suffocate under the force and power of others.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, each of us – as your Conference staff - has struggled with events of this past week through prayer, tears, anger, and more prayer. We look within ourselves and know that our own lives have not been the witness to God's kingdom that they should be. As we say in one prayer of confession, we recognize "all the things we have done, and those things we have left undone." As the staff of the Penn Central Conference, we commit ourselves again to the practice of witnessing to the image of God in every person through how we speak and how we act, embracing the Great Commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, knowing that our witness is fueled by flames of holy love for all humankind and the knowledge that "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

We pray that you, our communities of faith, will join us in continuing to advocate for the powerless, carefully examining your own privilege, and bearing witness to the holy wind that unites and empowers. May each of us be a single flame that brings light, burns away falsehood, and ignites healing for individuals, our churches, and our nation.

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, Transitional Conference Minister
Rev. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational and Ministerial Excellence
Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Transitions
Rev. Dr. Ronnette Comfort-Butler, Facilitator for Clergy Care and Care to Clergy Families
Ms. Zoe D'heedene, Coordinator of Camping and Retreats
Mr. C. Paul Keller, Office Manager



Happy Father's Day! June 21st

Excerpt from Artofmanliness.com

There are two stories of when the first Father's Day was celebrated. According to some accounts, the first Father's Day was celebrated in Washington state on June 19, 1910. A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd came up with the idea of honoring and celebrating her father while listening to a Mother's Day sermon at church in 1909. She felt as though mothers were getting all the acclaim while fathers were equally deserving of a day of praise (She would probably be displeased that Mother's Day still gets the lion's share of attention).

Sonora's dad was quite a man. William Smart, a veteran of the Civil War, was left a widower when his wife died while giving birth to their sixth child. He went on to raise the six children by himself on their small farm in Washington. To show her appreciation for all the hard work and love William gave to her and her siblings, Sonora thought there should be a day to pay homage to him and other dads like him. She initially suggested June 5th, the anniversary of her father's death to be the designated day to celebrate Father's Day, but due to some bad planning, the celebration in Spokane, Washington was deferred to the third Sunday in June.

The other story of the first Father's Day in America happened all the way on the other side of the country in Fairmont, West Virginia on July 5, 1908. Grace Golden Clayton suggested to the minister of the local Methodist church that they hold services to celebrate fathers after a deadly mine explosion killed 361 men.

While Father's Day was celebrated locally in several communities across the country, unofficial support to make the celebration a national holiday began almost immediately. William Jennings Bryant was one of its staunchest proponents. In 1924, President Calvin "Silent Cal" Coolidge recommended that Father's Day become a national holiday. But no official action was taken.

In 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson, through an executive order, designated the third Sunday in June as the official day to celebrate Father's Day. However, it was not until 1972, during the Nixon administration, that Father's Day was officially recognized as a national holiday.



"Give us, O Lord, thankful hearts which never forget Your goodness to us. Give us, O Lord, grateful hearts, which do not waste time complaining." –
Saint Thomas Aquinas

JUNE Special Celebrations

Birthdays... Have a happy one!

- *Alan McLin*
- *Sharon Thomas*
- *Rachel Bickelman*
- *Betsy Baker*
- *Matt Baker*
- *Bryan McLeod*
- *Beverly Patton*

Anniversaries... Congratulations!

- *Robert & Robin Yiengst*

20 Prayers to Pray During This Pandemic

By Jen Pollock Michel

In recent days, as COVID-19 has been declared a global pandemic and countries have taken urgent measures to stem the spread of infection, I wish I could say that my first impulse has been to pray. It's probably more honest to say that I've obsessively refreshed my feeds. The crisis is urgent, and I feel powerless. But perhaps feeling small is the best reminder to pray. Prayer is how we actively practice believing, so simply, so confidently, that God has the whole world in his hands. It's where we "let petitions and praises shape our worries into prayers, letting God know our concerns" (Phil. 4:6-7, *The Message*). Prayer is never the last resort of God's people. It is our first point of action. With that in mind, I've put together a list of 20 prayers to pray during this pandemic. Each one addresses the specific needs of a specific community. I'm fortunate to be a part of a church with many medical professionals, some of whom gave me advice on how best to pray for them at this time. I've included their responses here. I've also tried to think broadly about how the rest of us are impacted by the current crisis. This list isn't comprehensive, of course, but it's a good place to start. My hope is that it can provide words for us as we pray collectively (if also virtually!) as a church body. We believe there is a God who bends his ear to listen, and so we pray:

1. For the sick and infected: God, heal and help. Sustain bodies and spirits. Contain the spread of infection.
2. For our vulnerable populations: God, protect our elderly and those suffering from chronic disease. Provide for the poor, especially the uninsured.
3. For the young and the strong: God, give them the necessary caution to keep them from unwittingly spreading this disease. Inspire them to help.
4. For our local, state, and federal governments: God, help our elected officials as they allocate the necessary resources for combatting this pandemic. Help them to provide more tests.
5. For our scientific community, leading the charge to understand the disease and communicate its gravity: God, give

them knowledge, wisdom, and a persuasive voice.

6. For the media, committed to providing up-to-date information: God, help them to communicate with appropriate seriousness without causing panic.
7. For consumers of media, looking to be well-informed: God, help us find the most helpful local information to equip us to be good neighbors. Keep us from anxiety and panic, and enable us to implement the recommended strategies, even at a cost to ourselves.
8. For those with mental health challenges who feel isolated, anxious, and helpless: God, provide them every necessary support.
9. For the homeless, unable to practice the protocols of social distancing in the shelter system: Protect them from disease and provide isolation shelters in every city.
10. For international travelers stuck in foreign countries: God, help them return home safely and quickly.
11. For Christian missionaries throughout the world, especially in areas with high rates of infection: God, provide them with words of hope, and equip them to love and serve those around them.
12. For workers in a variety of industries facing layoffs and financial hardship: God, keep them from panic, and inspire your church to generously support them.
13. For families with young children at home for the foreseeable future: God, help mothers and fathers to partner together creatively for the care and flourishing of their children. For single mothers and fathers, grow their networks of support.
14. For parents who cannot stay home from work but must find care for their children: God, present them with creative solutions.
15. For those in need of regular therapies and treatments that must now be postponed: God, help them to stay patient and positive.
16. For business leaders making difficult decisions that affect the lives of their employees: God, give these women and men wisdom, and help them to lead self-sacrificially.

employees: God, give these women and men wisdom, and help them to lead self-sacrificially.

17. For pastors and church leaders faced with the challenges of social distancing: God, help them to creatively imagine how to pastor their congregants and love their cities well.
18. For college and university students, whose courses of study are changing, whose placements are canceled, whose graduation is uncertain: God, show them that while life is uncertain, their trust is in you.
19. For Christians in every neighborhood, community, and city: May your Holy Spirit inspire us to pray, to give, to love, to serve, and to proclaim the gospel, that the name of Jesus Christ might be glorified around the world.
20. For frontline health care workers, we thank you for their vocational call to serve us. We also pray:

- God, keep them safe and healthy. Keep their families safe and healthy.
- God, help them to be knowledgeable about the diagnosis and treatment of this disease, as well as the changing protocols.
- God, help them to stay clear-minded in the midst of the surrounding panic.
- God, deliver them from anxiety for their own loved ones (aging parents, children, spouses, roommates).
- God, give them compassion for every patient in their care.
- God, provide for them financially, especially if they fall ill and are unable to work.
- God, help Christians in health care to exhibit extraordinary peace, so that many would ask about the reason for their hope. Give them opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

God, we trust that you are good and do good. Teach us to be your faithful people in this time of global crisis. Help us to follow in the footsteps of our faithful shepherd, Jesus, who laid down his life for the sake of love. Glorify his name as you equip us with everything needed for doing your will. Amen.

Jen Pollock Michel is the author of [Teach Us to Want](#), [Keeping Place](#), and [Surprised by Paradox](#). This piece was adapted from her recent blog.



Message from Dr. Carrie Call

Dear Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference:

I am writing to share some recommendations and updates as we transition into the month of June and the start of summer. Please take the time to read through this message regarding the reopening status of our churches. I apologize in advance for the length, but there is a great deal of information. You will have time to share questions and hear answers (and examples from our churches) when we meet via zoom in June. The meetings are arranged by Association, but you are free to attend the one that fits your schedule best. (The meetings are listed at the very end of the message. Please register in advance.)

The Penn Central Conference has some updated recommendations for our member congregations regarding re-gathering our congregations for worship. These recommendations stipulate several things:

1. Our confidence that clergy and consistories charged with decision-making at this time will, in their discernment, faithfully consider the welfare of “the least of these”, including those in our congregations who are most vulnerable due to age or health conditions.
2. Clergy and congregations recognize how we serve as examples and models to our wider communities when it comes to Covid-19 response. What the church does, matters. People do pay attention.
3. Houses of worship in PA were never closed. You were and are free to meet as you discern. However, your Conference staff deeply appreciates the care you have taken to follow recommended guidelines from the state and CDC to keep all members as safe as possible.

As churches within the United Church of Christ, you always remain free to discern how and when you will worship in person. Our recommendations are offered from within the spirit of covenant and a faithful abundance of caution.

The Penn Central Conference recommends the following:

- A. **Churches that worship over 50 on a Sunday in counties moving into a green phase consider continuing to worship using on-line formats through Labor Day at earliest unless meeting outside.** This suggestion is based on the CDC’s recommendation that venues operate at 50% capacity. Please find your occupancy numbers and share them with consistory/council as part of your discernment. Consider setting up smaller groups to meet (e.g. a Bible study in the sanctuary) so that members have a chance to see one another.
- B. **Churches that worship in person during yellow or green phases consider using outdoor facilities**

whenever possible. The virus thrives in enclosed spaces with low air circulation. If you worship outdoors, you may allow people to use indoor bathrooms. One solution is to have a table set up outside the bathroom with hand sanitizer – use it upon entering, wash in the bathroom, and use again upon leaving.

C. **Churches that worship during green or yellow phases discontinue congregational singing (unless outside) and use musical guests instead.** We are aware that there is a great deal of information circulating currently about congregational singing. Some information and examples are anecdotal. We do not have enough direct research yet to make definitive judgments. Thus, our recommendation comes from an abundance of caution in response to the best experts at this time.

D. **Churches that worship in yellow or green phases continue use of masks, social distancing, and hand sanitizer.** Remember: the CDC currently believes that many people are asymptomatic for Covid-19. That means that you may carry the disease and pass it to others without ever feeling sick yourself. The purpose of wearing a mask is to protect others in case you are asymptomatic. The virus spreads best in close quarters with face-to-face or side-by-side contact of at least 5 minutes. Social distancing is critical when you cannot wear a mask. When indoors, practice an abundance of caution: wear masks, keep social distance, and make hand sanitizer available.

The following are some updates regarding the Penn Central Staff:

A. **The office will remain physically closed until after Labor Day.** Please do not expect to visit the office until after that time (even if staff are in during the day). Our contacts via phone and zoom have worked well, and all of your staff have adapted well to new formats.

B. **PCC Staff will continue to work from home.** Paul Keller and Carrie Call will be in the office 1-2 days weekly for correspondence, accounting, confidential files, and the like.

C. **Our new ACM for Congregational transitions, Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola, begins work on June 1st.** She will have access to the office to establish her new office space and will work from there or from home.

D. **PCC Staff will travel for in-person preaching engagements during the summer only for churches worshipping outside.** For churches worshipping indoors, PCC staff are excited to preach or engage in live stream, zoom and other worship formats as invited.

Peace, Carrie
PCC Conference Minister



...God declares that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young shall see visions, and your old shall dream dreams.... Acts 2:17 (NRSV)

The Strengthen the Church offering supports the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations. Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill on its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities.

As God calls our congregations to be the church in new ways, your generosity will plant new churches, awaken new ideas in existing churches and develop the spiritual life in our youth and young adults.

Please join us by planting the seeds needed to grow and sustain our denomination by making a gift to the Strengthen the Church offering. *Thank you!*



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Be sure to visit us on Facebook page
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