



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF ANOKA

Providing Hope to our Community

Making new disciples of Jesus Christ
for the transformation of the world

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Dear UMCA,

Never could we have imagined we would be writing a letter like this one. Even as the news of a new contagious virus first shifted us to connecting online, we imagined that it would be for two or three weeks. We did not expect this, and we lament with you in the ways that this coronavirus has disrupted our life together. And yet, we are still the body of Christ. We still worship and pray, sing and praise, trust and hope. Our faith is not going to be broken, our commitment to one another will not be severed by a virus. We are learning new ways every day to share the gospel and live as followers of Jesus. Even as we pray for an end to this pandemic and a path forward to gathering together, we acknowledge that such a time has not yet arrived. Therefore, we have met with the UMCA Servant Leadership Board and together we have made some decisions to help us plan appropriately for the summer months. See the information below, followed by a cheat sheet you can post at home to connect to various opportunities.

At this time we anticipate that there will be NO in-person worship in our sanctuary for the duration of the summer. We are making decisions day-by-day about how to best proceed forward. Decisions around worship in the sanctuary are the most difficult of all because while we long to gather in this familiar way, the combination of circumstances of a Sunday worship service creates some of the highest risk for transmission of the virus (enclosed space, closed ventilation, extended period of time, number of people, and rituals that include touching, sharing food, and a lot of talking or singing). Additionally, to hold Sunday worship in the sanctuary safely would demand an extensive amount of labor in preparing the space, managing people coming and going, costs for additional cleaning supplies, and attending to protocols for such in-person, indoor gatherings.

We do not see this as a decision to close the church, so much as the church being opened to new ways of connecting with one another and providing hope to our community. We believe that continuing to wait to gather in our sanctuary is the only way to ensure that we do not put one another at risk or generate a hot spot for virus transmission. Making this decision now allows us to apply our energy to other ways to connect and support one another in the coming months. We continue to pray for a shift that will bring us together again, and if we are able to gather safely sooner, we will let you know. We will continue to generate weekly online worship, which you can find on Sunday mornings at 9:30am (or anytime after that) on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

Sunday morning virtual coffee hour is here! We're excited to offer this as a way to see some familiar faces and check-in on each other. The gathering will be hosted through our private [UMCA Facebook group](#). Contact us if you need help getting into the group. The gathering will start right after worship and will go for about half an hour.

We will be creative in searching for safe ways to stay connected this summer. Depending on the best available information and the requirements we need to follow at any given time, we are brainstorming and beginning to plan for some creative ways to connect this summer including drive-to-church ideas, midweek worship in our cars, and outdoor small group possibilities for socializing, learning, and worship, and more. We will be in touch as new opportunities unfold. The first such opportunity will be soon, on Sunday, June 7 as we recognize our graduates! See the enclosed flyer about that event and how you can participate!

We would love to get you connected with a small group during the week. See the attached chart to find out what groups are meeting, how you can participate, and who to contact if you need some technical help joining in. Would you like to host another small group opportunity this summer virtually or in person with physical distancing measures? Contact Pastor Laura to share your ideas! Additionally, if you'd like to receive a weekly phone call from someone at church, let us know and we will get you connected.

Office Hours will be available throughout the summer on Thursdays, 11am-3pm. Please wear a mask if you decide to visit the church office and follow the posted signs to keep a safe distance. Also, many Thursdays there will be ways for you to stop by and get involved in our Sunday worship, like having your picture taken or recording a short video. Keep an eye out for such opportunities in the e-news.

Do you need tech help? Give us a call at church if you could use some help with your technology. Some of our small groups include a call-in option so you can listen to the discussion over the phone. If you have access to wireless internet, we may be able to connect you with a used iPad for worship. We can't promise to solve every problem, but we are willing to try!

How are you providing hope to our community? Are you praying for your neighbors? Making masks? Calling for Meals on Wheels? Volunteering with Family Promise? Donating to ACBC? Sending cards? Making meals? We would love to hear about the ways you are being the church right where you are.

Thank you for continuing to give generously to the church. Your regular giving, additional giving, and accelerated giving have kept our financial position strong, even in troubled times. We are well positioned financially to weather this storm. We appreciate your commitment to continue supporting UMCA! In late June, watch for a communication from us with a detailed financial update and information on our budgeting process for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

We care about you, and we are thankful for your patience and care for us and one another. We are honored to be your pastors. Stay safe. God bless you.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Rachael and Pastor Laura