



First United Methodist Church of Hanford

Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.



505 N. Redington Street Hanford, CA93230
559-584-4075 (voice) 559-584-5438 (fax)

office@fumchanford.org

http://fumchanford.org

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Re-launching In-Person Worship and Ministry Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Last week, I was walking on the church facilities and to be honest it felt a little weird. The last service that we did in the sanctuary was on March 9, which means that it has been nearly four months since Sunday service has taken place in that beautiful building. As my eye took in the sweep of the roof and all that gorgeous stained glasses, I really felt that a re-introduction was in order; “Hi, I am Pablo and I have missed you.”

My guess is you probably feel the same way and have been thinking about when we can re-gather. Maybe you have even been wondering what church will look like when you get there knowing full well that it probably won't be quite the same as when we were last together. I am hoping in this letter to answer some of your questions.

Many of you may be wondering when we will be able to worship in person together. Your Ministry Support Team is working on forming a plan. We received the handbook for re-launching in-person gatherings from the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church last week. This week we received the form for the plan we must submit for approval to Superintendent Debra Brady.

https://www.cnumc.org/files/pdf_documents/covid19/cnumc+plan+for+resuming+in-person+worship+ver+2.3.pdf

However, just yesterday Bishop Carcaño sent out an email advising us against re-opening prematurely in this time of escalating COVID-19 cases. She had previously recommended July as a time frame for safe reopening but now considers that waiting a few more months is prudent. We can however work on our plan in the meantime.

The first steps are to form a back-to-church team to develop the plan, prepare the building, develop a cleaning protocol and provide training for those team members who will be on-site on Sunday morning. We will be instituting a rigorous cleaning program to ensure that the Church building stays clean and safe.

We also will be surveying the congregation by telephone and survey by email to determine interest in returning to Sunday worship and concerns or ideas you have. We want to know how our online presence is being used as we intend to continue to provide it going forward, including possible live-streaming of the in-person service.

For worship, my guess is that you will have already realized that passing the peace, passing the plate, shaking hands and giving hugs are regrettably out. Moving along those lines, Bishop Carcaño (of course the State of California, too) has mandated that we all need to wear face masks, must maintain a 6-foot distance between household groups. Congregational singing cannot happen for the time being, communion will be of the single use kind. We are also going to encourage you all to use one entrance in, one exit out (clearly marked). There will be no coffee hour, Sunday School, or food service in the beginning.

There are other details to be sure which we will provide when they are all together, but those are some of the major pieces.

So you may be thinking that the above does not sound like your idea of church, and in many ways I would agree. However, we are living in a new world, and as the Bishop has repeatedly said our first job as Methodists is to do no harm. With that in mind, our rules are pretty strict, and at FUMCH our plan is to adhere to them so everyone stays safe. Even then, we know that in person worship will never be safe enough for people who are over the age of 65, immune-compromised or maybe even with small children.

As always, if you have thoughts, concerns or specific questions, our leadership and I are here. Stay tuned for further details as we get closer to our re-opening.

We hope you will continue to stay connected to your church by:

- praying that we continue stay connected to and serve God regardless of our separation from each other. The church is not the building. We are God's messengers to the world. May we be beacons of hope and reconciliation.
- calling, emailing or texting each other;
- informing Pastor Pablo or the Office when there is a need or news to report;
- checking the website and Facebook for Wednesday Reflections and Sunday Worship Liturgies and Video Messages;
- joining the Sunday Zoom meetings if only to pop-in and say hello (ask the office for help with Zoom if you need it);
- joining with others in Zoom or email/text study groups;
- sending your tithes and offerings by mail (Please mail gifts to First UMC of Hanford, 505 N. Redington St, Hanford, CA 93230), online giving (Give online at: <https://onrealm.org/fumchanford/-/give/now>) or bank transfers. Checks may also be dropped through the mail slot at the office. The office is closed, but the telephone voice mail, mail delivery and email are fully functional.

“Be a Channel of God’s Grace”

Rev. Pablo Rovere