

After much prayer, your pastor has chosen to begin Outdoor Worship Services. This morning, I wrote the attached plan. Jeff Wright, our District Superintendent, approved the plan. It appears we have settled into a place where worship may take place weekly.

Covid-19 has changed every facet of life. I believe that fear, the enemy of faith, has accomplished its purpose. Christ is fully present where people fight, freeze, and take flight. Christ is present but God's people do not have eyes to see Him, ears to hear Him, or faith to follow Him. Some people are fighting. I see them giving energy to authoritarianism. Others among us are frozen in place, feigning death, hoping that this too shall pass and leave us "normal." Still others have taken flight. They have flown to other churches, discovered online worship, and filled the void with TV preachers and TBN.

Let me be candid. With all the new rules that United Methodist pastors must follow, this pastor understands that we have been taught to count Tradition Supreme. Traditional worship is a Service. Tradition says we gather together in Sanctuaries, built by human hands to sing hymns/songs/praise music, and follow an order of worship. (Do not be misled. Praise Worship and Contemporary Worship have their own version of tradition.) Friends, Tradition is one facet of the Diamond called Worship. In the United Methodist Church, we discern Worship through four facets: Scripture, Reason, Experience and Tradition. This should not surprise us. Reason, Experience, and Tradition are hallmarks of 17th Century Enlightenment from which Methodism came into being. So let me ask, where is the Holy Spirit?

I believe the Holy Spirit is delivering us from the temptations of the Enlightened Mind to have the same Mind that was in Christ as He suffered, died, and rose to new Life!

Upon arrival at Trinity, I heard the cries of many voices longing for an experience of Trinity Tradition. The Apostles Creed is a Tradition. The Gloria Patri, Hymns, the Lord's Prayer, and standing for the reading and hearing of scripture forms Trinity's Traditional Worship. I did my best to heed the cries of the people. Wisdom taught me long ago to comfort people with their Traditions hoping to gain enough trust to do as Jesus commanded. He commands me to intentionally develop discipleship groups from those seeking the narrow road that leads to life! I retired and agreed to serve Trinity another year because I saw a spark of Discipleship being fanned into the Fire of the Holy Spirit.

Long before COVID -19 protocols changed our lives, Church attendance was in decline. Across all Worship Genres and Church Sizes attendance declined from every other week to once every six to eight weeks. People began to designate themselves as "Nones," meaning no religious connection. Others left the Church calling themselves "Done" with institutional religions. I hope and pray that Outdoor Worship Services will give the Holy Spirit room to rekindle the spark of discipleship God first poured into us.

Friends, Jesus shows us that Worship is our Way of sharing the Truth of Christ's mercy, grace, and love. When Life becomes Worship, God's children are known by their Love services.

I hope you will attend our worship services. Either way I respect:

- Those who protest wearing a face mask to worship services.
- Those who elect to Worship at Home.
- Those who have found other places and ways of worship.
- Those whose immune systems are compromised.
- Those who believe COVID-19 is a conspiracy.
- Those who label themselves "Nones" and "Done."

I respect these people because Jesus suffered and died for them. Jesus is the fulfillment of every word of Scripture living Life in a body of Flesh. Disciples are people who experience their flesh being filled with every word of Scripture. How awesome it is to experience the Holy Spirit delivering us from evil to heal us with the Truth of God's mercy, grace, and love.

One in Christ,

Robert Burlingham, pastor