

To the fellowship of the United Baptist Church of Ellsworth,

As of right now, we are planning to resume corporate worship on Sunday, June 14th. New guidelines and restrictions will necessitate several changes in order for us to gather in safety and compliance. For sure, things will not look or feel “normal” for a while yet. This letter is written to help you know what to expect when you come back to worship.

If you have been following the phased reopening plan at all, you know that we are currently at a place where gatherings of 50 or less are permitted. To accommodate everyone in our membership, and also leave room for visitors on any given Sunday, we are planning to add a third service.

For the foreseeable future, we expect to hold worship services at 8:30, 9:45 and 11:00 a.m.

In order to insure we stay within the 50 person limit, we will be contacting all of our members and regular attendees and asking you to commit to a particular timeframe for the duration of these restrictions. We recognize that committing to a service does not mean you will be attending it every single time, but that when you do attend, you will attend in that time slot. If or when we have more people than we can accommodate in a service, we will make some calls and see if individuals will be willing to move from one to another. We ask that you be flexible in this area. We also want to encourage you to feel free to invite friends and acquaintances, we will have room for visitors in each gathering. Though, you may need to sit six feet away from them!

Worship services will last approximately 30 and not more than 45 minutes. There will be little to no difference in the style or content from one service to the next. The sanctuary will be cleaned prior to each worship service.

You are likely tiring of all this by now, but we would be remiss if we did not state it: If you are not feeling well, if you have travelled outside the state within the past two weeks, if you are displaying any of the symptoms of or suspect you may have been exposed to someone with Covid-19—please, out of an abundance of caution, submission to the authorities governing us and love for your neighbor, stay home.

Additionally, if you fall in the category known as “vulnerable”, please do not feel as if you have to come to worship as soon as the doors are open. Just because you can gather, does not mean you should. We will “live stream” our 11:00 worship service. We will also continue to record and post the sermons, both on our website, www.ubcellsworth.org and our Facebook page. We value you much beyond your presence at worship, so please take the necessary precautions to be safe. If that means holding off attending church for a while longer, we fully support your decision.

For those who plan to come right away...let's begin with your arrival!

Please do not arrive earlier than 15 minutes before the service. This is particularly important for the middle and last services, as we need time to clear the parking lots and do a lot of cleaning before the building is ready for worship.

Please be mindful of social distancing when entering and exiting the building. For those who don't mind a little extra walking, we are recommending the use of the front door. This can be accessed from the upper lot by walking down the sidewalk, and from the lower lot by walking up the stairs. Folks who must use the elevator, who cannot walk the distances to the front door or those dropping off children for nursery services are encouraged to park in the lower level and use the lower entrances, which will keep most of the building traffic going “one way”.

If you use the elevator, please do so individually or in family groups. The elevator will be cleaned prior to and between each service.

If it's possible, please exit the building through the same door you enter.

When you come through the door, please move straight into the sanctuary (unless dropping off children for nursery). Please avoid the temptation to congregate anywhere within the building (i.e., foyer) or in high traffic areas outside the building (i.e., the church front steps). Fellowshiping outside while maintaining proper distancing is suggested. We don't want you to feel like you can't speak with your friends and fellow members, just please do that safely and outside. Inside, a friendly wave will do. As much as we may want to hug one another, physical contact of any kind is discouraged.

Even though we will be happy to see you, you may not be greeted the way you have been in the past. Social distancing is not personal! A friendly attendance taker will be in proximity of the upstairs and downstairs entrances keeping track of the number of people coming into the building, so we can stay within the mandated capacity for each service.

To reduce the risk of transmitting germs, we will not be passing out paper bulletins. Announcements in all services will be projected prior to and following worship, and we also intend to use e-mail, Facebook and our website to keep you apprised of church activities.

As you enter the sanctuary you will notice the chairs arranged at 6' intervals. This will be the set up prior to each service. Families are free to move the chairs so they can sit together, and we have additional seating to accommodate family groups.

If you choose to sit in the balcony, where the chairs are arranged as usual, please sit in either the front or the back row, while leaving four seats between yourself and anyone who is not a member of your immediate family or the circle of friends you have been socializing with.

During this season, which presently looks like it may last from June through August, we are encouraging families to worship together in the sanctuary. We will provide nursery care during all services for children who are infants through age 6. Infants to children through age 3 will continue to be cared for in the Richardson Room. Children ages 4-6 will gather in the first Sunday School Room. Moving to two locations is designed to decrease the number of children in one space at one time, as well as reduce interactions at check in and pick up. A more complete list of the protocols instituted to insure children's health and safety in the nursery will be provided to parents of youngsters and posted outside both the Richardson and Sunday School rooms.

We will not be providing children's church during this time. We ask that children 7 and older accompany their parents in worship.

For general safety and your peace of mind, the Nursery and Sunday School rooms used will be cleaned prior to each service. All children's ministry workers will have their temperatures screened before each nursery shift.

If anyone is uncomfortable leaving their child in the nursery, they are welcome to have their little ones join them in worship. If a child becomes fussy or fidgety, parents will have the option of leaving the sanctuary and watching the streaming service in the Dining Room, the Prayer Room and/or the Counseling space.

The worship service will not be the same type of service we are used to.

For the first month at least, we will not be singing as a congregation. Studies have shown that congregational singing in a closed space increases the risk of spreading the virus. So initially we will be relying on instrumental music, projected lyrics and recorded music.

We will not be passing the plate! That does not mean you can't make an offering. Throughout this pandemic we have provided three ways for contributions to be made: on-line giving through the website, via mail to the church address and via mail directly to our Financial Secretary, Bob Maddocks.

In addition to these three options, we will place two offering stations within the sanctuary, at the front and back. These will be clearly marked and easily accessible, and you may place your offering in one or the other at any time. Following each service, these offerings will be collected and safely stored.

In worship we will be offering prayers to God and reading from His Word. Please bring your own Bible and note taking accessories, as neither Bible nor hymnals nor notepads will be available in this initial phase.

During worship we will be hearing member testimonies. Sermons will be shorter and more conversational in nature. Our worship in this time will have a more traditional, liturgical sequence.

We will not be celebrating communion until we can truly be together and do so safely.

When the service is over, you will be asked to proceed straight to an exit in an orderly fashion. Please exit through the front door, if possible. If you have to pick up children from the nursery or Sunday School room, please exit at the lower (Spruce Street) level. Also, please be mindful not to linger too long in the parking lots, at least not after the first two services, as we expect worshipers to be arriving who will need the parking space.

For reasons related to the risks of handling food and beverages, along with trying to avoid groups congregating inside, we will not be having coffee fellowship this summer.

For your convenience, the restrooms on the upper floor in the Welcome Center will be open for use. By all literature circulating these days, public restrooms should be used only if absolutely necessary and avoided as much as possible.

The restrooms will be cleaned prior to and between all services. All other restrooms in the church will be marked “closed”. Certain areas of the church that are not currently in use (i.e., the McEldowney Room, the kitchen, etc.) will likewise be closed to foot traffic.

On your way in and out of the sanctuary you will notice wall mount and stanchion mount hand sanitizer, which is there for you to use as you see fit.

Beyond the measures described in this letter, we will not be requiring or providing any personal protection items like masks or gloves. You are welcome to bring your own, and if you fall in the “vulnerable” classification, we strongly encourage you to consider wearing a mask.

Finally, everyone knows we are living in uncertain times, and so we must be prepared to change plans with little notice. In the event that worship services need to be cancelled we will send notification as soon as possible via e-mail, Facebook and a website announcement.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please put them in an e-mail addressed to pastor@ubcellsworth.org or call or text my cell and I will do my best to answer them.

Looking forward to resuming worship safely, and seeing you in person!