

Dear St. Paul Friends,

Since the middle of March, most of us have been primarily staying close to home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For some of you, this season has been trying for your spirits. Like many in Scriptures, all of us in one way or another feel like we have been in exile as well.

As our communities begin to slowly open, many may be wondering how St. Paul UCC may be visioning a building reopening plan in the coming weeks or months. So far, our Regathering Team has met virtually on two occasions. Mimi Llamas and Dave Hoffmann are the co-chairs of the team. Others who are part of the team include Pastor Michelle, Wayne Caughman (council president), Jan Friedrich, Patrick Kinney, Dana Rosenzweig, Craig Bielke, Dr. Bill Wade, John Posth, Stephenie Bauza, Tina LakeHopper, and Rachel Budko.

Our team has been reading many articles regarding the safety of churches in the time of COVID-19. We are examining the recommendations of the Illinois South Conference as well as other thorough documents on the safety of worship, keeping in mind the guidelines of the region/state and the data from the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan Area and the Metro East.

Many of the articles that we have read recognize that worship services are considered some of the highest risk situations, and the risk increases with singing and being indoors. Finding solutions on how to hold meaningful worship while still keeping all attending safe is not a light task. Yet deep practical and theological conversations emerge from our meetings. We know that worship may seem quite different when we regather in person, but through gradual steps, we are seeing concrete plans taking shape. Our goal is to craft a solid plan before creating a definitive timetable, including the best times and ways to gather in person for meetings and other events.

There is much we still do not know about the COVID-19 as it is a novel, or new, virus to humans. Acknowledging this as part of the process means trial and error as we make progress, taking steps forward and maybe a few back or sideways, knowing that we are still moving in the direction of being together. We know that God's grace is with us in this process.

In the meantime, we continue to hold worship in a variety of platforms. Not only can you listen to worship on Jubilee 690 AM on Sundays at 9am and 9pm, but you can also watch the services on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/stpauluccbelleville/> as well as on our website StPaulUCC.org. You can participate in Zoom Fellowship Time on Wednesdays at 5pm or Sundays at 10am, and most days, Pastor Michelle connects with congregants on Facebook Live. For more information, contact the church at (618) 233-3303. The church can put you in touch with us. You can also reach out to us at the following:

Dave: davehoff95@gmail.com

Mimi: mimillamas221@aol.com (618) 616-2148

Pastor Michelle: pastormichelle@stpaulucc.org

Wayne: waynecaug@yahoo.com

If you have questions about technology, please give us a call - we have people willing to help connect you to the internet! We thank everyone who has continued their pledges and offerings

during this time away from the church building and participated in the many meetings we have hosted on Zoom!

We recognize that our congregants communicate in many different ways. We are committed to keeping you informed on our progress through various communication means, including the OSP, Facebook, our website, and our email updates.

Like the Israelites during the Babylonian Exile, we too have much hope. We know gathering at the St. Paul UCC building will be happening again. And we look forward to the day when we can congregate safely, valuing the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of all.

Blessings,

Dave Hoffmann, Regathering Team Co-Chair

Mimi Llamas, Regathering Team Co-Chair

Wayne Caughman, President, St. Paul UCC Church Council Rev. Michelle Torigian, Senior Pastor