**Ministry Council Meeting Minutes**
**May 18, 2020 at 6:30pm via Zoom conference call
Special Called Meeting to Consider Re-Opening Plans**

Attending: Judy Belter (chairperson), Rev. Jason Valendy, Rev. Estee Valendy, Melanie Grice (recording secretary), Lou Tiner, Erik Skaarer, Amanda Stansberger, David Gerig, Polly Soulsby, Michael DeLaune, Keith Bierley, Toni Bliss, Jules Plewes, Ellie Skaarer

Pastor Estee opened in prayer at 6:33pm.

**Objectives for Meeting**

Judy stated the objectives, which were shared in an email with the council.

1. Set a re-opening target date
2. Set a target date for staff to return to the building
3. Define the process to prepare for re-opening

She noted that we received instructions from Randy Wild, including requests to notify him of re-opening at least two weeks before the targeted date, plans for re-opening and specifically for worship, plans for 1-2 years in the future, and plans for 5 years in the future.

Judy stated our guiding principles.

1. Safety for staff, volunteers, and congregation
2. Communication to everyone about rationale used in development of plans
3. Compliance with state and local guidelines
4. Flexibility, knowing that adjustments will need to be made as information becomes available and circumstances change
5. Sensitivity to the needs and wants of the congregation

Lou said that he didn’t feel comfortable pushing for a date until we know more. He felt we should not be pressured to set a date prematurely.

**Sharing Individual Opinions**

Keith – The church should re-open in stages, starting with staff in mid-June. He noted that some staff will not be ready to return to the building for various reasons. Staff are able to socially distance. He is unsure about worship, possibly mid-July. Children’s activities should re-open last, as it is impossible to socially distance small children.

David – Worship cannot re-open until at least mid-July or August because COVID-19 cases in Texas are still on an upward trend. The wishes of the worship staff should be taken into consideration since they have to be there, and allowing others in the Sanctuary at the same time may make them uncomfortable. Staff can return earlier, possibly in June. The risk factor is still high and safety is a major concern. He noted that the early church met in homes, and that homes can be sacred spaces.

Jules – Open in stages with staff first, and then worship with social distancing. She noted that we should learn lessons from the Pandemic in 1918, in which a second wave was worse than the first. Moving too quickly could be catastrophic. Believes there are too many unknowns, but best guess is late summer at this point.

Polly – If we start too early, it is impossible to go back and correct. The damage will have already been done. We should keep watch on the data and also on the plans and experiences of other large churches. Livestream has been received very positively, with staff suggesting ways to participate from home and make the time meaningful. She misses the congregation, but doesn’t want to rush. It is too early to discuss dates. Staff can decide for themselves how to return and socially distance while in the building.

Lou – Setting a date is “putting the cart before the horse”. We need to know what to have in place to prepare first. Staff are able to socially distance, but those who are uncomfortable should stay away longer. We can set a date for staff in the next 30 days, but leave options available. Lou noted that many of those he interacts with in small groups are really missing activities and seeing others in person, even knowing that they would be at risk. Tentative return to worship in September, with Building Blocks and children’s activities in the fall.

Estee – Sees mid-July as a moving target. Think about what has to be in place and what the experience will be like with no corporate singing or everyone wearing masks. As a pastor, she thinks a lot about those who are craving connection and has seen tears from those who desperately want to be back in the building. There is a pastoral concern for connection and care. We need to communicate that all plans must remain flexible and share the rationale behind them. Use statistics on community spread in our area as we make decisions. Worship staff are already in the building and trying to socially distance. She doesn’t want to push anyone, but thinks a June timeline would work for most staff.

Melanie – Believes most staff can return in June, with particular instructions and training on staying safe in common areas, such as the copy machine. She has reservations about partially returning to worship, both theologically and logistically. It doesn’t seem right to require reservations to worship or to stop people at the door who wish to participate. She suggested starting with smaller groups in different settings to try to meet the need for connection without large gatherings.

Amanda – Doesn’t think we need to set a specific date at this time, just keep communicating and monitoring the situation. KUMC also needs to plan for the extra costs involved in re-opening, such as PPE and sanitizers. We need to continue offering multiple ways to connect from a distance, as some congregants may not feel comfortable coming back to the building for months. We could possibly survey the congregation in the future.

Toni – Times of change are when better ways come into being. Personally, she is not comfortable being in social situations right now and wants to continue connecting through Livestream. Worship staff is utilizing technology in great ways. Choir, nursery, etc. are critical parts of the worship experience, and it is impossible to have those now without putting people in jeopardy. She advised continuing to be brave, think outside the box, and listen to various opinions. She defers to staff members to decide what is best for them.

Erik – Setting a date seems premature. Make an entry plan first, then a date timeline. Let staff work individually with supervisors to determine return dates and trust in their judgment. For corporate worship, we should never turn anyone away. We should not return until the worship experience will be a nearly normal experience. Would like to see facilitating and supporting the gathering of small groups outside the church building.

Ellie – If the church is offering gathering, it feels wrong to let some people in and keep others out – “God’s table, not ours”. She has enjoyed worship at home and would rather be safe than sorry. Believes we should “open doors” to staff when they feel comfortable, with safety precautions.

Michael – His family has enjoyed worshipping at home. He has recently been talking to church friends who have been laid off or have had to lay other people off, and they are especially missing connection time. He would like to see a come and go time in the Sanctuary to pray. Many people feel a strong attachment to the sanctity of the space. Perhaps offer ways for people to be in the space, but in smaller groups. Think about ways to provide more opportunities to meet people where they are and solicit opinions. For staff, some need to be in the building to be productive, but work at home should be available if the job allows. Perhaps more, smaller opportunities throughout the week rather than trying to meet in big worship services.

Jason – Shared a screen of the Tarrant County COVID-19 statistics, which are now categorized as “substantial”. He believes we should tie decisions less to date and more to the status in the county. Change procedures when the county moves from “substantial” to “minimal to moderate” and stays there for 14 days. A change in status would trigger Ministry Council to meet and determine next steps. A change to “none to minimal” for 14 days would trigger another meeting.

Judy – Her position is an abundance of caution through the summer, recognizes that even if we set a target date, that it could change if circumstances improve. We need a plan to communicate with the congregation and all other parties involved.

**Discussion**

Michael – It seems like we are far more than two weeks away from opening. Proposed creating a phased plan first and then setting a date.

Judy – The questions that arise are: What to do physically to prepare? How do we communicate? How do we train those who will be in the building? We are doing a disservice to members if we set an opening date without educating members on what the experience will be like.

Estee – She likes the idea of phasing in small groups first.

Lou – Proposed forming three teams to focus on staff/operations, ministry/small groups, and Building Blocks/children’s ministries.

Estee – She likes the idea of having small groups in the Sanctuary, but not on Sunday. Perhaps mini worship services during the week as the threat level goes down.

David – It is important to meet the physical, emotional and mental health needs of the congregation. Find ways to help people connect in small groups. Offer a survey or other means to solicit the needs of the congregation.

Lou – Only offer a survey if we know what we are going to do with the results, and be very deliberate about what is asked. The congregation will be forgiving for not being prepared at the beginning of the pandemic, but will blame leadership and hold us accountable for not having a plan going forward.

Judy- Need to get the right people together to make plans. For example, usher captains would be needed in making detailed worship plans.

**Next Steps – Organize into Groups**

1. Staff – Keith will discuss with SPR and determine a task force to create a plan. He will report back by the next meeting
2. Worship – Estee will take the lead (Michael, Lou, Dave, Jules and Ellie also volunteered) and put together a team to develop a plan. They will look at creative ideas to meet needs and also practical plans to implement. Estee would like to have some input from a mental health professional on providing care.
3. Building Blocks/Children’s Sunday School – Keith and Lou will work with Kristin, Nancy and Abigail so they can provide expertise.

Judy – The groups will come up with ideas and determine the practicality of them. She clarified that the plans need to be made by Keller UMC and its leadership teams. Randy Wild just wants to be informed and act as a central collection of best practices.

Estee – The re-opening will be more like a dimmer switch than turning on a light suddenly. She added the need for a team to discuss opportunities for adults.

1. Adult Ministries – Lauren, Judy, Polly and Toni will create a task force.

Judy – The four groups will start working on their focus areas and bring tentative plans back to Ministry Council. The pastors will include an update of the results of this meeting in their Friday email. It is important to continue to educate the congregation on the complexity of the task of re-opening.

Lou – The mark of a good team is being comfortable having and sharing different opinions, but united in communicating outside of the team.

**Other Business**

Keith announced that Jules and Ellie have agreed to do the bulk of the writing for feature articles about staff members.

Jason will send a link for the next meeting when the date is close. Judy will send information in advance, but without the link.

Estee will talk to Lauren about her role for Adult Ministries, then Polly will connect with her to get the group started and set a date on the calendar.

Jason closed the meeting in prayer at 8:31pm.