

## MID-WEEK MESSAGE FROM PASTOR LESLEY

Pine Bluffs UMC May 27, 2020

Good morning, friends! What a beautiful summer day we are enjoying! I am going to be using this message to communicate and update you on what is going on in your church! As I said from the pulpit on Sunday the leadership team met last Thursday to address Bishop Karen's mail about guidelines for "(Re)-Launch Church: (Re) Considering Church in a COVID-19 World." The guidelines from the Mountain Sky Conference "are written for clergy and local church leadership to address the care and preparation of the physical plant of the church. More specifically, how church prepare their buildings in a way that provides the safest possible space for their congregation to gather and worship in this most extraordinary time." Bishop Karen repeats twice in this 33 page Guide Book in bold face print: **"I do not want one single case of COVID-19 traced to one of our churches because we did not care for those whom Jesus loves."** This statement also is the bottom line for me.

Accordingly, the leadership team met last Thursday evening and using the guidelines provided by the state and local governments as well as the Mountain Sky Conference decided that we would ask for the Bishop's permission to reopen/relaunch church on Pentecost Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. We will let you know ASAP when we get confirmation of this day from Rev. Jeff Rainwater, our D.S.

Please know that if you are in the "high risk" category and you do not feel comfortable coming into church at this time, I totally understand your choice and recommend that you stay home and stay safe. We will be continuing our live-streaming even as we open the church doors with provisions for your health and safety. Pastor Dan at the Crossroads Community Church wrote this to his congregation when he was letting them know about reopening their church. I think it is well-said and I would like to quote from it (with his permission):

"On a pastoral note: There is tension all around us. There are people who diligently wear masks in public and people who don't even wear a mask. There are people who would rather stay home and those who are desperately in need of social interaction. There are those who think that we should have never shut our doors and those who think that we are opening them up too soon. There are those who have a deep fear of Covid-19 and those who dismiss it as "much ado about nothing" and many other areas of disagreement that can easily lead to division in society and within the church."

In a recent devotion by Ray Simpson in Celtic Daily Light he quotes from John Wesley: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?... Every wise person will allow others the same liberty of thinking which they desire they should allow themselves... And how shall we choose among so much variety? No one can choose for, or prescribe to, another. But everyone must follow the dictates of their own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity. They must be fully persuaded in their mind; and then act according to the best light they have."

As the founder of Methodism, Wesley expresses it so well. We can love each other as God loves us, fully and unconditionally, and show that love to each other as His disciples. We can respect each other's opinions without being threatened and at times agree to disagree. But we can then have unity in our diversity and unity without uniformity! This is actually who we are as Methodists, giving each other the mercy and grace to make our own decisions while serving each other in love as Christ has instructed us to do.

We have applied to the Bishop to move from Red status (closed to all in person worship and gatherings) to Yellow status –a cautionary return with a

gradual return to gatherings, depending on the circumstances. It is anticipated that this could cover a number of months. Here at Pine Bluffs Michael has been doing some deep cleaning for several months and the church is looking great! He plans to shampoo carpets on Saturday. We will have hand sanitizers, wipes and masks available as you come into the church. We also plan to have the pews roped off to help with social distancing, with only one family in a pew. Every person coming into the sanctuary will be asked to wear a mask and observe social distancing. At this point there will be no singing during the service as that propels the Covid-19 droplets even further because of the forceful nature of the act. Of course for the duration of this Yellow Status there will be no gatherings for Fellowship Time in the Fellowship Hall or else where outside of the sanctuary. There will also be signage placed in pertinent places to remind you of these new guidelines.

We ask for your prayers and support as we continue to move through these difficult times together. Sunday is Pentecost Sunday and a reminder to wear your red in celebration of the birth of the new church!! Whether I see you in person this Sunday or thru live-streaming I am looking forward to it!! I miss you all so much! Please watch for updates on your email as we move forward!

Blessings, Pastor Lesley