



# WestWind Church

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

May 4, 2020

Dearest Church,

As I write, it has been seven Sundays since we last gathered as a whole church for worship in-person. The coronavirus pandemic sent us all to our homes to shelter in place, partly for our own safety and partly for the sake of our vulnerable neighbors. I'm grateful to those that have stayed home as a way to love our neighbors well. I also am extremely grateful for those of you that have had to continue to work, at home and out in public, to keep the world turning.

Gathering online for our first Holy Week and Easter together was not how I hoped to share those special celebrations with you; however, as I've mentioned before, I am grateful for the ways this is challenging us to re-envision how to be the church in new ways. I am especially thankful for the selfless work of those that have been a part of our skeleton worship leadership crew to make worshipping online a possibility: Chris Wymore, Melanie Harlos, Corey Uribe, as well as, Susan Bartlett, Kathleen Allbright, Lexie Harlos, Nicole Shephard, and Tom Uribe. They have made this crazy stressful time more fun and enjoyable. We continue working to improve our online worship experiences and hope that these virtual gatherings provide some inspiration and encouragement during these challenging times.

WestWind has established a new **Benevolence "Care and Compassion" Fund** that will be used to provide immediate relief to those in need. You can give to this fund by notating your financial gift for this purpose. We already have received over \$500 for this purpose! Thank-you for your generosity!

**If you find yourself in need of extra support (money, groceries, errand-running, conversation, counseling, prayer, etc.), your church is on standby to generously provide.** Don't hesitate to reach out to me or one of our Elders. Which reminds me to also share great gratitude for our fabulous Elders who have been helping reach out to our congregation: Sherry Uribe, Chuck Allbright, Annette Peterson-Bush, Dawn Needles, and Curt Harlos. (If you are unsure of who your designated Elder is, please reach out to our Elder Chair, Sherry Uribe.)

As you know, Texas has decided to begin "phase one" of opening businesses and restaurants to the public; however, **we believe that we are still a ways away from it being safe to begin gathering again in-person.** Our counties have not met the phase one recommendations set out by public health officials to have at least 14 days of decline in new diagnoses and deaths. In fact, Dallas and Tarrant counties have had some record-high increases in these areas over the past week.

WestWind's Leadership Team met on Wednesday night to discuss if, when, and how we would begin re-entry plans for gathering in-person. **We unanimously agreed that there is still too much risk and unknowns to begin in-person gatherings at church. We also agreed that when we begin to gather in-person again, we will have to take small progressive steps and ensure that many precautions are in place to prioritize the well-being of all those under our care.** This will include considerations of physical distancing, masks, cleaning and screening procedures, and safe worship practice. **It was affirmed that when we resume meeting in-person it will be vitally important to continue to "gather" virtually with those that are medically vulnerable and/or not yet**



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**comfortable venturing out into public.** The reality is, until there is a vaccine and/or effective treatment for COVID-19, we won't be able to celebrate a full return to "in real life" gathering.

While we can't provide detailed dates, timeframes, and plans right now (because of the ever-changing and unknown nature of the pandemic), we did at least want to provide a summary of our general plans and reassure you **that the Leadership Team of WestWind is continually in prayer and discernment for your health and well-being, as well as, for the health and well-being of our beloved church.**

So, here's a general summary of what we're envisioning as our "re-entry" plan:

## Phase One: the one we're in right now

- Weekly worship is online only, with a skeleton crew of 4-6 people in the sanctuary.
  - You can continue to worship with us live on our Facebook page ([facebook.com/HereInTheWest/](https://www.facebook.com/HereInTheWest/)) or on our YouTube page (search "WestWind Church" on youtube.com or here's the long link: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCLGwqkm2-ZuRw-sFC8TIsQ?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCLGwqkm2-ZuRw-sFC8TIsQ?view_as=subscriber))
  - Children Worship & Wonder will also continue to be available after "big church" worship.
- Gatherings, activities, meetings, and conversations are held over screens only.
- Youth Group will continue to meet via Zoom on Sunday's at 4pm with our fabulous Youth Minister, Chris Wymore
- Leadership Meetings will continue to take place via Zoom on the second Thursday of every month and additionally as needed.
- For those that may be interested in leading any type of virtual gatherings (bible studies, small groups, etc.), I am happy to set-up a Zoom meeting and share information with the congregation.
- Ministerial Staff and Elders will continue to reach out to members to ensure all are healthy, cared for, and work to help fulfill any needs.

## Phase Two: the in-between

- Weekly worship continues online with a skeleton crew in the sanctuary.
- We may begin considering offering small group worship services in a manner that allows space for physical distancing and requires mask use. This is based on CDC recommendations that, in this phase, gatherings of more than 50 people should be avoided.
- May consider offering in-person small group gatherings, with a limited number, following strict protocols.
- Prepare in-person worshipers by publishing safety/hygiene guidelines, including pre-worship symptom check, 100% wearing masks, disinfecting high-touch surfaces, frequent hand-washing, neither arriving early nor lingering after, maintaining social distance of 6 feet, etc.
- Reimagine certain worship practices (i.e. Communion, Offering, singing, etc).



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- Virtual gatherings, activities, meetings, and conversations continue as needed.

## Phase Three: not quite normal, but close

- Weekly worship online continues, and high-risk persons are encouraged to remain at home.
- In-person worship on Sundays is open, with hands-free greetings, masks encouraged, and reimagined communion/worship practices. Chairs in worship space are spread apart.
- Virtual gatherings can begin to phase out.
- Continue sanitizing/cleaning of high traffic/touch areas
- Food-sharing will likely not be recommended until a corona virus vaccine is widely available.

## Phase Four: Big Party!

I recognize that the longer this endures, the more challenging it is becoming. Loneliness, depression, and anxiety have the potential to creep in as we are isolated from one another and burdened by the unknowns and our lack of control. **Please rely on the support of your church as you need to and find ways to stay connected to your friends and family. May you feel the prayers of your beloved community enfolding you!**

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Casey Tanguay

If you're interested in reading more about some of the best practice recommendations for churches, here are a couple I've found to be the most helpful thus far:

Wisconsin Council of Churches' "Returning to Church Following COVID-19." [wichurches.org](http://wichurches.org)

Letter from our General Minister and President, Teresa Hord Owens:

[https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Returning-to-worship-together.html?soid=1100462525592&aid=sLdKp\\_hS4Ws](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Returning-to-worship-together.html?soid=1100462525592&aid=sLdKp_hS4Ws)