

# Growing the Family of God

July 2020

Telling the Story

Serving the Community

Nurturing Believers

*Coffee with Jim*



Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:18-19 cf. Isaiah 42:9)

When the ancient prophet wrote of “a new thing” what he had in mind was the exodus from Babylonian captivity. For many of us the experience of a pandemic has felt like we were being held in captivity. We have had to learn new modes of behavior such as “social distancing” and wearing face masks. We have been excluded from eating in restaurants and perhaps most difficult of all, not being able to gather for corporate worship. Although we have attempted to make worship available and meaningful, we freely acknowledge that it is not the same as being together.

The urgent calls for police reform, and the ongoing protests over the deaths of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others have caused great fear and tension in our nation. It is a moment in our nation’s history when we may feel as though we are in a wilderness or desert.

God speaking through the prophet asks the question: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” I wonder if we can perceive what God may be doing at this period in our corporate and personal life. I do not believe that God caused the pandemic, nor do I believe that it is God’s will and purpose for young men and women to be violently killed.

Amid the chaos and partisan hatred and bigotry it is time to ask what the church’s response needs to be. Not only the response of the corporate body, but my personal response. What do we perceive that God would have us take away from the current situation in which we find ourselves? What is the “new thing”?

For the ancient peoples who first heard these words it was a path from bondage, a return to their homeland. It was a “way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.” The way forward for the ancient peoples began with repentance. Banishment to a hostile foreign power was the result of a corporate turning away from Yahweh. It is not happenstance that the

first of the Ten Commandments declares, “you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

The failure of the ancient Israelites was to place self-interest above allegiance to the God who saved them and rescued them from bondage. The first thing that we need to recognize as we move into the “new thing” that God is promising is that we pledge our allegiance not a person or an institution, but to the God who gives us life, the Savior who died for us, and the Holy Spirit who empowers us.

God did not send Covid-19 to punish us for our sin, but the pandemic encourages us to reevaluate our priorities and values. From the pandemic has come the recognition of both corporate and personal sin that must be confessed for healthy relationships to be restored. Racism will not be overcome, justice will not prevail, until we acknowledge its inherent evil, confess, and repent. Repent means to change direction. Repentance means both a change of attitude and a corresponding change of action.

God cannot do a new thing until we choose to change our attitudes and priorities. God will not act against our self-will. If we choose to embrace systemic racism, it will continue to be a factor in the lives of our sisters and brothers of color. God will not act against our self-will.

We need to perceive from the experience of the pandemic and social unrest that grips our nation that we are far from “one nation under God.” We are a divided nation, where justice is not equal for all. We are better than this. God has created us with the innate ability to love and have compassion for one another. If we want to live in the new reality that will survive the pandemic, we need to learn how to love God and love our sisters and brothers. If we truly want to see an end to racism, not merely talk about, we need to learn how to love God and love our sisters and brothers.

*Jim*

# Reopening - Plan of Action

The Board of Ministries met on Thursday, June 11 and has adopted the following plan of action for reopening the church for worship and limited small group activities during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

*As you know this is a fluid situation and the following plans may change based on new information and/or additional health and welfare guidelines. We ask for your continued patience and understanding.*

## June 8 - July 31, 2020

\*The Youth Room will be made available for small group gatherings. This will be the ONLY space available for gatherings during this time.

\*All requests to use this space MUST be made in advance through the church

\*Regularly scheduled activities ( e.g. Women's Circles) MUST be scheduled in advance to avoid potential conflicts.

\*If you use the room for a small group meeting you MUST wipe the entire room down (tables, chairs, doorknobs, etc.) with provided sanitizing wipes at the conclusion of your meeting.

\*Social distancing rules are still in place and wearing masks is encouraged. We will have masks available for you if you do not have your own.

## The church office will reopen Monday, June 22, 2020

\*The office will remain locked during business hours.

\*To access the building you will need to call the office (815.842.4321) prior to entry.

## Renewing Worship (June 28 - July 26, 2020)

Beginning Sunday, June 28th, a drive- in/outdoor worship opportunity will be offered at 10 AM.

**\*PLEASE NOTE: Worship on July 5 will be ON-LINE ONLY.**

\*You may bring a lawn chair and sit outside on the lawn or you may sit in your car and listen to the service on FM radio.

\*For your safety and the safety of others, proper social distancing should be observed and handshakes and hugging are strongly discouraged. Face masks will be available.

\*In the event of inclement weather, outdoor services will be canceled. In that case, the service will be recorded for broadcast on-line later in the day.

\*Children will be recognized during the Children's Time, but not invited to come forward.

\*There will be no Sunday Morning Connections Meetings

\*There will be no Nursery, Youth, or Children's Ministries until school resumes

\*There will be no paper bulletins

\*There will be no offering plates passed. You may still give your tithe by mailing it to the church office or on-line via our website ([www.fbcpontiac.org](http://www.fbcpontiac.org))

## August 2, 2020\* - Return to Sanctuary and customary schedule.

*\*This date is subject to change based on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic and local and Federal health guidelines.*



2 Connie Grider  
3 Steve and Lisa McBride  
5 Dorley and Brenda Dodd  
6 Sue Schell  
7 Jackson Crawford  
7 Janet Halford  
9 Daniel Flessner  
10 Mark and Amy Levin  
10 Lisa McBride  
12 Mel Beck  
13 Hayley Walters  
14 Scott and Cindy Knight  
15 Louise Gray  
15 Owen Wolfe  
16 Ronald and Gayle McBeath  
16 Ryan Miller  
17 Andrea Goldsmith  
19 Jim and Marian Dixon  
20 Caden Ferguson  
21 Steve and Sarah Walters  
24 Eileen Hughes  
26 Raceyn Miller  
26 Janice Staley  
26 Terry and Carol Stanton  
26 Bill and Phylis Bowman  
27 Dale Newsome  
29 Janice Letsos  
31 Clyde Francis  
31 Kate Hoover  
31 Sharon Matteson  
31 Jay and Lisa Hurd

## IMPORTANT REMINDERS

⇒ **Worship will be on-line July 5th.**

⇒ **In case of rain, outdoor/drive-in worship will be cancelled. In this case an on-line worship opportunity will be available later in the day.**