



August 6, 2020

Dear friends,

One of the key things United Methodist pastors learn early in ministry is that it's not wise for a new pastor coming into a church to immediately make changes. When you're new to a setting you haven't sufficiently built up trust or established credibility, so it's particularly risky to do anything that draws attention to your newness and emphasizes that you're not the former leader whom your church members all know and love. For that reason (along with many others), I've been hesitant to make a decision regarding our worship services on Sunday mornings.

While I've definitely enjoyed meeting the small group of folks that have regularly attended those services and genuinely appreciated the support I've felt from those wanting to come out and "be there for me" I've also felt a nagging fear that by meeting in person we haven't been completely faithful to our call to love each other completely. Yes, we've done a great job taking all of the necessary precautions and I know that some of you have communicated that you feel completely safe gathering together. But to love each other completely, in my mind, means to do everything possible to protect the vulnerable among us- even if that means doing things we don't want to do.

One of my greatest frustrations during this pandemic has been that I've felt that there has been an unfortunate lack of consistent and thoughtful leadership from key church and government officials. I've lost count of how many times I've thought or said aloud, "I just wish (insert leader's name) would take a firm stance on (insert relevant issue)." During my times of prayer, listening to church members, talking with other pastors, and reading articles written by a variety of professionals, it has occurred to me more and more that if I want good leadership for our church it has to start with me. With that said, **I have decided that I would like us to suspend in-person worship indefinitely and return to "virtual only" worship beginning on Sunday, August 23rd.**

I recognize that some of you may not agree with this decision, but I assure you that I do not make it lightly or without concern for how it might impact our congregation. With the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths continuing to rise throughout South Carolina and especially in Beaufort County, I would rather that we err on the side of being "too cautious" rather than later lamenting that we weren't cautious enough. As we approach August 23rd and for the entirety of the time we only worship virtually, I will continue to pray, listen, gather information, and do my best to lead our staff, church leaders, and congregation in adapting to our "new normal." I ask not only for your prayers and support, but also for grace and understanding as we all figure this out together. Waters Edge is still Waters Edge regardless of what our Sunday mornings look like, and I believe that God can and will still use our church to bless our community.

Thank you to everyone who continues to work hard to help Waters Edge remain faithful to our calling as a church. I want to especially thank all of those who've helped us implement our safety measures. Please hear me when I say that I feel that we've done a great job at being safe while gathered together. The decision to "take a step back" and refrain from meeting in person is not the result of any failure on our part, but rather demonstrates our commitment to truly loving each other and doing what we must to keep each other safe. With the help of our church staff and church leaders, I'm confident that we can

continue to offer meaningful worship experiences and even offer new opportunities to “be the church” together although we are apart.

As we move forward into our “new normal,” let’s remember what we say every Sunday and have clung to since the church was founded: **God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.** This will remain true no matter where we are or how we meet. May we all continue to put our hope and trust in God, prayerfully and faithfully doing everything we can to live into the church that God is calling Waters Edge to be now and in the future.

Blessings and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ricky", written in a cursive style.

Rev. Ricky Howell

Pastor, Waters Edge UMC