

April 23, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Edgewater UMC,

I MISS ALL OF YOU! You are all such a blessing to me and to Edgewater UMC! This is so hard being apart and I am looking forward to us being “more together” soon. (I have been trying to be “more together” for years just not in this context!) I want to share some of what is going on with your church. Being closed is sure a lot more work than being open and not what we want at all! We hope to find more ways to help us stay connected and pray you are connecting with one another in some way. Weekly correspondence is one of the ways we are seeking to connect and remind all of you of our love and God’s great love for you. You are all so very special and an important part of this vital congregation.

Worship

I wish I had a date to share for opening but we have no restart date yet. Bishop Carter has asked us to not hold public worship through May 15. Our hope is that we will be able to restart soon. Even though we do not have a date, we are making plans to restart and provide for your health and safety when we come back to church. We know some will not feel comfortable coming back at first due to health needs and we will continue to offer other options for worship through online services. Changes we make for safety concerns may seem strange, but we trust these changes will be temporary measures.

I want to share with you some behind the scenes photos of our new worship reality at Edgewater UMC. Check out the enclosed page of photos. Life is different but God is present with us. I am so thankful for all who have been watching worship services online. Worship services online have not been perfect. (But if I recall correctly, we have also had some bloopers each week in person!) We have had to learn a lot quickly but with the limited equipment and resources we have, I am very pleased we have been able to carry on with worship so well. I am thankful for everyone who has helped. Our worship committee, worship team, tech volunteers, lay readers, musicians, and staff have all been great. Our roles and tasks have shifted. Our work together is being done from home and the sanctuary at different times. It all takes much more time than how we did worship before. Holy Week was extremely difficult due to some unexpected technical problems. Our worship staff (Andy and Melissa) each dedicated at least 30 hours of work to make our five worship services happen. That is not counting the time I and many volunteers also put in that week. I want to thank everyone for being a “part of the solution and not part of the problem”. Your words of encouragement have meant more than you will ever know to all of us.

Thank you to those who are participating in worship and viewing it on Facebook, our website or YouTube. You are the most important part of our worship services. We have had more people connecting online than we normally have in worship. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” We trust that even in a time of fear, illness and death, God is working for our good. It may be impossible for us to see in the middle of a pandemic, but if we are looking, we see God’s love all around us in our broken world.

Finances

We are receiving offerings electronically, by mail and in person at the office. Many have given extra and paid ahead during this time. We are grateful! The Finance Committee and I have sought out opportunities to help the church get through this time. We applied for and received a temporary reduction in our mortgage payments from the Florida Conference Foundation and a \$200 grant from the Conference for technology needed for online worship. Weekly mailings with envelopes for offerings are being sent out in place of our normal weekly offering during worship. We are continuing our stewardship campaign and hope to conclude that soon. We have applied for a \$20,750 CARES Act forgivable loan through TD Bank and the Small Business Administration. If received, this will help with the negative financial impact of not having in person worship. We are looking for creative ideas for fundraising and additional ministry grants. If you have ideas, please share them with me.

While we have concern for our own needs, we also are aware of the horrible impact this crisis is having on the Boys and Girls Club. The church has made a temporary reduction to their monthly building usage fee during the time children are not present. Their staff is still working out of the church building and providing contact and services to children through the internet. We are grateful to be a part of this ministry to children and families in Edgewater and they are grateful for the ministry that has been provided monthly by the group that Hedy Jacobsen coordinates and expressions of love from EUMC.

Trustees

The new offices and other planned renovation projects are almost complete. Some cabinets in the reception area are being added. The front metal roof repair is scheduled. We are continuing the process of moving in and moving out of offices. Our computers, printers and security cameras are operational as of this week, but we are still waiting on Spectrum to complete new wiring for our office phones. Thank you to all who are helping to mow and care for our property. Thank you to our Trustee Chairperson, Lou Giovanniello, our Trustees, and volunteers for their great job and many hours of help with renovations, moving, organization and decorating our new areas. Our custodian, Fred Dean is doing a great job sanitizing and cleaning areas of the church that are in use. He has every floor shining with new wax!

Office Volunteers

We are planning to have a volunteer in the office Monday through Friday again beginning in May. Dot and I have totally missed our office volunteers! Please do not volunteer if you have pre-existing health concerns that put you at greater risk from the coronavirus or if you are not comfortable coming back yet for any reason. Our primary concern is keeping everyone healthy.

Our office phones are still working at the old office and you can leave a message on the office number, 386-428-6552, which we check daily. If you need to reach the office, please call me at 618-974-8468 or Dot at 610-506-2361. Our cell phone reception is not always the best so please leave a message or text or email if you do not get through by phone.

Food Pantry

Our Food Pantry volunteers are doing a great job continuing to safely give out food. They are picking up food weekly from Second Harvest, receiving donations and organizing food on Thursday mornings from 8-10 a.m., and giving out food on Saturdays from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. We are so grateful for all they do. They are some of our front-line heroes!

Prayer Ministry and Mercy Ministries

Our prayer and caring ministries have been active and are keeping in touch with our shut-ins and others during this time. A new prayer ministry is beginning this Saturday-Drive Thru Prayer. On Saturday from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. and on Sunday from 1-3 p.m., volunteers will be outside on the prayer garden side of the drive on the southwest side of the church to pray with anyone desiring prayer whether they are walking, on a bike, or driving. Volunteers will be practicing social distancing and taking other safety precautions as they pray with members of the congregation and the general public who request prayer. Please continue to let the office know your prayer needs by phone, email or text or drop off written prayer requests to the secure black mailbox on the north side of the church near the end of the drive.

Card Ministry

If you need cards, new ones are in the office and we can arrange safe pickup or delivery for you.

Your Ministries as Salty Servants

I know I may have missed some things. I apologize if I have failed to recognize other ministries. And I am sorry this letter is so long. Can you tell I miss seeing all of you? Talking to a camera each week is no fun! If at all safely possible, we hope to begin having some small in person meetings, groups and activities next month. We will send out information and guidelines when we can do this.

I know many of you are active doing things that help others as part of your Christian witness. I know many are finding creative ways to stay in touch and fun activities that are helping your sanity during this time. Send us photos we can share with your church family in one of our next letters.

This is such a different experience for most of us. As I heard one person put it, "We are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm." Whatever is going on in your life please share some positives and some joys. Also please ask us to pray specifically for the rest that may not be so positive: your health needs, your family concerns, financial concerns, your fears, your loneliness, your struggles. Remember and take to heart, Isaiah 41:10 "Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand."

In service with you and Christ, Pastor Donna