

Orting UMC Phased Plan

PHASE	1	2	3	4
	Stay Home, Stay Healthy	Limit travel, interact with <5 non-family persons per week, physical distancing	Open travel, groups of <50, physical distancing	Open travel, groups of 50+, physical distancing.
High Risk Populations	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Stay Home, Save Lives	Discretionary
Leadership Responsibilities	Assess church/ministry capacity, develop plan reimagining ministry	Assess church or ministry capacity, review and update plan, communicate progress/updates	Assess church or ministry capacity, review & update plan, communicate progress/updates	Assess church or ministry capacity, review & update plan, communicate progress/updates
Worship	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual	Hybrid. in- person and virtual services. (no live singing, limited or no coffee hour)
Meetings, Groups	Virtual Only	Virtual Only	Virtual Only	Virtual and In-Person
Building Use	Closed	Limited to Pastor, designated volunteers, essential services	Limited to Pastor, designated volunteers, essential services	Open
Community Connections & Outreach	Virtual and limited essential crisis services offered outdoors	Virtual and limited essential crisis services offered outdoors	Virtual and limited services in building	Virtual and services in building
Essential Services	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines	Following strict state & local guidelines
Office	Pastor Alexa works from home.	Pastor Alexa may work from office.	Pastor Alexa available for scheduled in-person appointments only. (max 5/week)	Office open with clearly communicated office hours.
Communion	Will resume on first Sunday of the month, starting July 5th, with elements found at home.	First Sunday of the month, with elements found at home.	First Sunday of the month, with elements found at home.	First week of the month, in person, (hopefully) with health precautions in place.

If you have any questions, concerns, or are in distress, please don't hesitate to call Pastor Alexa at 509-627-9395.

In 2017, Brittney, who lived alone, asked if she could start spending some nights at my apartment, since she was having extreme pain through the night and couldn't sleep because of it. So, she did. Each night, we both got fitful sleep, trying to keep the pain at a bearable degree. But one night, it wasn't manageable. The pain was everywhere; none of the pain-managing methods we had were working. With tears soaking her face, and pain exhausting her whole body, she cried out, "something is wrong with my body!" My mind shouted: "Emergency! This problem needs immediate attention!"

We went to the emergency room without any real resolution; we just knew she wasn't dying at that moment. She soon made an appointment with a new primary care doctor, and was referred to specialists. For six months, we lived on this brink of emergency. I regularly asked aloud, "Have your symptoms changed or is this pain the pain you always feel?" At first, every day felt like an emergency. Every change in pain, every little thing should be reported to the doctor to help with a diagnosis. Everything was urgent. Needing immediate attention. Emergency. It didn't take long for both of us to be totally wiped out. But our exhaustion didn't seem to matter, because EMERGENCY!

At some point, probably about a year after the night she cried, "something is wrong," I realized that we fell into a new, healthier rhythm. We realized, for one, that a diagnosis would not come quickly, and without that, there would be inadequate treatment. We also realized that it had been a year and she hadn't died, or come close to death. Awesome. So, we could trust that that pattern would continue. And finally, we realized that we were now able to discern whether each moment, each pain reported out, was an emergency or a moment of the long-term health crisis. Along the way, we had figured out how to triage each day, each symptom, judging whether something called for low, medium, or high urgency. And it made all the difference. It still makes all the difference.

We probably sound ridiculous to other people. Recently, Brittney had a kidney stone, had 11/10 pain, and I hardly reacted. "Ask your doctor what you should do. We're not just going to go to the Emergency Room!" Because when the pain becomes chronic, when your brain accepts that the crisis is going to last a lifetime, or, at least, much longer than you initially thought, your view is longer, everyday becomes more manageable. This pandemic, though having moments of emergency for individuals, is becoming an ongoing crisis calling for triage, adaptation, and management as new realities and challenges emerge.

Our state has outlined a four phase model for reopening the economic and social sectors. Right now, we are in Phase One, and there are **at least** three weeks between each phase. **Because our congregation is made up of all but a few folks over the age of 65, our congregation can not gather safely until Pierce County moves into Phase Four.** At this point, the most optimistic estimate for gathering for in-person worship, while following all guidelines, is August 2nd. More likely, we will not be able to gather in-person until at least the fall.

Moreover, until there is a vaccine widely available, singing, whether choral, congregational, or soloists, will be unsafe. Communion will look much differently for some time, in order to protect one another. And, even in Phase Four, we will be required by our

denominational body and state regulations to observe physical distancing and sanitization guidelines when we are able to gather.

This reality calls us to shift our mindset from “waiting until things go back to normal” to planning for a new reality, long-term. I think that, although difficult, making this mental and spiritual shift, we will be able to creatively imagine our future, rather than remain in a holding pattern for years. We can move from an emergency mindset to a posture of managed crisis. Additionally, this way, we can be delighted by quicker-than-anticipated resolution, rather than constantly disappointed by too-optimistic forecasts.

Other churches will likely return for in-person worship before we do. Orting UMC, as it stands, consists predominantly of people over the age of 60, meaning that most of our congregation is recommended to abide by the ‘Stay Home, Stay Healthy’ order through Phase Three. I know that we are eager to get back to worship, but I can not offer in-person worship services with a clear conscience until we are in Phase Four out of love for the population our church serves. This reality may make you frustrated and angry and sad. I am frustrated and angry and sad about the reality we are currently living in, too. Those feelings are worthy of acknowledgement and tending. And, we each have only one life. I will not put your life, my life, our congregation’s life at risk because we are frustrated and angry and sad. That is the covenant I make with you today.

So, we adapt the ministry of the church to the new reality. We’ve begun this work by drafting a reopening plan. The church council will continue developing this plan as more information emerges, and as time passes, with protocol in place for reopening safely and smartly. The first draft of that plan is included with this letter, and any updates will be communicated by mail, and on our website: www.ortingumc.org.

Additionally, I have been reflecting on the realization that we have been conducting very few ‘essential’ services in our community. There’s a lot of baggage at the moment regarding the word and category of ‘essential,’ but it has been helpful for me in gauging whether we are living out Christ’s command to serve the hungry, thirsty, strange, naked, sick, and imprisoned; whether we are meeting the physical needs (which have spiritual consequences) of our neighbors. We’ve been participating in some of these ministries in passive ways in the last year, but are being prodded to continue and begin more active ministries of service, adapting to the needs being revealed by this pandemic.

The first thing we are going to do in response is put together and distribute hygiene kits to the most vulnerable in our community. We received funding from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), to purchase the materials for kits and some meals for distribution. If you are someone who is less vulnerable than others, and would value distributing these kits, call or email me (509-627-9395, ortingumc@gmail.com). Something to celebrate!

This same creative thinking is required of us for the entirety of our church's ministry. Here's what is needed from you in order for use to do that together:

- Please complete the survey and return it to the church in one of the pre-stamped / pre-addressed envelopes included. (Should take 10 minutes or less.)
- Touch base with the people in your community care group (on the next page). I (Pastor Alexa) can not keep regular contact with everyone as I'd like, but we can all keep in touch with one another, offering greater care than we've been able to so far.
- Prayer! Please be praying about the future of our church and world. Pray hard for miraculously quick vaccine & treatment development. Pray hard for a clear way forward, that the volunteers and other resources needed to care for one another and for the wider community will reveal themselves. Pray hard about what ministry you are called to participate in - even a new one!
- Give generously. I've included several extra pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes for your convenience. Mission in the community often requires money, a limited and unequally distributed resource. Sharing generously is how change is effected.

Finally, God did not cause this suffering in our world. In the story of Noah and the Ark, God floods the whole earth because the people were so sinful, so wretched. And then, after forty days of watching people and animals drown and die, God set God's bow and arrow in the clouds, with the arrow pointing at God - a tool of accountability to the covenant God made with Noah, and with us: God will never flood the earth again, God will never bring worldwide devastation to us again as a tool of anger and punishment. This virus is not from God. This virus is one reality of the imperfect world we live in. It is really terrible. We will honor these lives by ringing the church bell at noon on Monday, June 1st. The Faith Action Network has declared June 1st as a National Day of Lament and Mourning, to mark the devastating threshold of 100,000 lives lost to COVID-19 in the United States. Bell ringing is a language that all people can understand, a Pentecost practice that proclaims that all lives are sacred to God. If you happen to be parked near the church building at the time, please keep your windows up, and do not come within six feet of others.

God is with us, mourning the lives lost from this devastation, frustrated with us in our shrunken worlds, celebrating with us each breath taken. God will guide us forward with hope for a beautiful future; no matter what.

Peace,

Pastor Alexa Eisenbarth

Name: _____

**only Pastor Alexa will see your individual responses. Council members may see anonymous aggregate data.

I would feel better about the current situation if Orting UMC could _____

One need I am noticing in my community is: _____

This need could be met by: _____

I participate in the online worship services as offered:

- Never
- 1-2 times / month
- 3-4 times / month

How important to you are the worship videos available online as they are now?:

- Not important at all
- Somewhat important
- Pretty important
- Very important

Another experience I'd appreciate is: _____

One reason I am having a hard time participating in virtual worship/offerings is:

- I don't have internet access
- I don't have a device that can access the internet
- I don't know where to find virtual offerings online
- I'm not connecting spiritually with what is being offered
 - If so, what would be more engaging: _____
- Other _____

I would appreciate it if:

- There were more at-home Bible Study resources made available
- The worship services were made available on DVD
- Other _____

One thing I miss the most about when we could gather together is: _____

Continued on Back

