Dear University Heights Church Family,

The Deacon body of UHBC met last evening to discuss recommendations regarding our Worship services and other important church activities that generally occur on Sundays. It became clear, that with the sudden and significant rise in Covid 19 cases in our community and region, we were going to need a more long-term comprehensive plan or set of recommendations to follow. The goal of these recommendations is to increase the safety of our church body, including staff and volunteers, as they engage in corporate worship. The Pastor and I (Todd Green, Chairperson of the Deacons) felt it would be useful for the deacons to meet, discuss, formulate, and ultimately endorse a set of recommendations for Sunday Worship services, Sunday School, and Child/Nursery care. What follows below are those recommendations.

These recommendations will be constantly evaluated, and can be modified, changed, dropped or added to on an ongoing basis. At some point, City or State officials may declare more strict guidelines for gathering and that will take precedence over our recommendations. The goal and intent of this process, including the specific recommendations agreed upon by the Deacon body, is to promote the safety and protect the health of our church body. We view the following of these recommendations as a way to demonstrate God’s love to each other. We know that following these recommendations means giving up much of what we all love and cherish about worshiping together. It is a sacrifice. We, as a Deacon Body, are asking for all of us to sacrifice for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are asking all of us to remember our Lord’s command: “love your neighbor as yourself. “It will take all of us working together to keep each other as safe and healthy as possible. We may not be able to prevent infections from occurring outside the church walls, but we can all work together to lower the risk of spreading the infection within the church walls and the church body.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. UHBC will hold an 8 am service that is reserved for those 65 years old and over and those whom are at “high risk.” Health conditions that would constitute a person to be at “high risk” include: Diabetes type 1 or 2, moderate to severe Asthma or COPD, moderate to severe Heart Disease or heart failure, Chronic Kidney disease on Dialysis, Immune Suppressing Diseases like HIV or other specific Immune Deficiencies, being on immune suppressing medications for the treatment of Autoimmune or other inflammatory diseases, taking Chemotherapy for cancer treatment or having finished in the not too distant past with Chemotherapy, having advanced liver disease, or having severe Obesity. Also, being on long term daily steroid pills or injections causes immune suppression and would qualify for high risk.
2. UHBC will hold a 10:30 am service. This is opened to all that would like to attend.  For both services, masks will be required. We understand small children may not wear masks. For older children, youth, and adults, masks are required. Masks will continue to be available for pick up as you enter the foyer. These masks are yours to keep. They are provided by the hard work and generosity of our very own Joy Bag Ladies. Social spacing will be observed. Every other row will be utilized and there will be 2 seats in between each family, friend group or individual. We will use different rows for the 8 am service and the 10:30 service.

The Fellowship Hall and the balcony are available for seating if social spacing cannot be maintained in the main sanctuary due to the number of worshiper’s present.

We ask that gathering in the foyer and halls be kept to a minimum and that people move quickly into the sanctuary and back outside after the service.

1. There will be just one family group or individual in the restroom at a time. There are signs provided to indicate occupancy. Please use these signs and return them back to unoccupied when leaving.
2. Frequent use of hand sanitizer is encouraged and should be easily found around the sanctuary, the foyer, the restrooms and the exits/entrances.
3. The offering can be placed directly into the offering plates that will be stationed at the entrances/exits of the main sanctuary and the balcony.
4. The Sanctuary will be cleaned weekly. Of note, the Covid 19 virus generally does not remain infectious more than 3-5 days once it is on an object such as a chair, countertop or doorknob. Therefore, Sunday to Sunday, the risk of left over Covid 19 virus, that is capable of causing infection, is very low.
5. We recommend services should be kept on the short side in terms of duration, and we feel it safest to have less congregational singing than normal. Singing does increase the risk of viral suspension in the air. Mask are required and should continue to be worn throughout the service, including while we are singing. The Music/Worship leaders will have their masks off but will be a safe distance from the worshipers.
6. There will be no “Official “Sunday School, Nursery/Child Care or Children’s Church. These activities are difficult to ensure social distancing during and require many volunteers. Many of these volunteers are traditionally in the High-Risk group as determined by age or by other criteria. If they do not personally fit into those criteria, they may live with or care for someone who does. It is not appropriate to ask these folks to take this risk and it would be very difficult to staff these activities without them. This is the rational for not having the above activities. If Sunday School classes do meet and use the church facilities, we recommend members wear masks and socially distance.  Please make sure the church office knows the room that was used so it can be cleaned.
7. Please do not attend worship services if you have a runny nose, cough, sneezing, fever, headache or body aches, acute onset of fatigue, loss of smell or taste, sore throat, shortness of breath, or d~~i~~arrhea. Also, do not attend services for at least 10-14 days after you have been exposed closely to a person that tested positive for the Covid 19 virus.
8. If a person tests positive for Covid 19, they should not attend worship service for at least 10 days after their first symptoms appeared. They must also not have had a temperature above 100.0 degrees for at least 3 days prior to coming to worship. The lack of fever must have been present without taking any temperature lowering medications like Tylenol or Advil.
9. Any staff member that meets the CDC guidelines for “high risk,” or whom lives with or helps care for a “high risk” person, may choose not to attend a worship service or other church  activity if they feel social distancing is not being maintained or masks are not being worn.

I know this list may be “exhausting“ to some of you. For others, there may be many more things you would like to see in it. At this point, the above are at least a group of recommendation the Deacon Body has endorsed, and seems to be a reasonable starting point for going forward. We feel these recommendations will hopefully get us through the Summer and to the starting of the school year in a safe fashion.

The Deacons encourage the Nursey, Children’s, Youth and University Committees to begin meeting soon with their respective staff members to start formulating their own plan for ministry. The ministries of UHBC must continue. Covid 19 will make it more challenging, but the Deacons would like to challenge the staff and committees to work together to prepare for the Fall. There are many resources online, and people within the church body, who can be resources to help formulate these plans or advise once the plans or protocols have been developed by the committees. Also, we need help in ensuring that our “Seniors Ministry” is not being left out as it is most challenging to know how to safely conduct activities, visits, worship and classes with senior adults and those at high risk. We are open to suggestions as to what to do.

Finally, if you are in need or know of a need that the Deacons or the Church Staff may be able to meet or help with, please call the Church office and report this to Stacy or Beth. They will get this information to where it needs to go. This has been and continues to be a difficult time. Whenever I am feeling down or things are tough, I read Psalms 100. In closing, please read Psalms 100 or your favorite Psalm and close in a prayer for our Staff and church body. We must all work together. I know we will.