

Dear CLA Family,

Greetings in the name of the Lord!

On March 22nd, we as a Church decided to move all of our worship gatherings, classes and groups online. Please understand that Governor Lamont never closed the churches in CT. He just limited their capacity in gatherings and respectfully so. We decided to close our building to show our love and care for you and for our community by helping with the fight against the COVID-19 health crisis.

I want to thank you. You've been faithful to attend, invite and to give. Our church family has remained strong, outward-focused and caring. I'm proud of you for fighting off selfishness, frustration and fear.

We've learned a lot through this. I pray we never again take meeting together for granted. For many of you, this has been an opportunity to re-calibrate priorities and schedules. **"His Kingdom First" must be our life approach.** The lessons of this season will be lasting.

At the same time, we observe the following destructive trends in our society: suicide hotline calls are spiking, domestic abuse cases are spiking, alcohol sales are spiking, pornography use is spiking, addiction and depression is spiking, and news outlets report that divorce lawyers nationwide are ramping up for an anticipated flood of new filings following the lifting of 'stay-home' orders.

We've come to the point that *not* gathering for worship and the expression of our communal faith may be a greater risk to our community as a whole than gathering would be.

People, even Christians, are more lonely and isolated than ever. Christianity is a "one-another" faith. It is inherently a faith-system that cannot be fully practiced in isolation. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit co-exist eternally in relationship and we are designed in His likeness. We are created to be together in community. Digital community has been a beneficial stop-gap, but it has not satisfied the intrinsic spiritual need that we have for gathering with other believers.

I was inspired the other day by a quote from Martin Luther who penned these words during the Bubonic plague of the 1500's. *"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I will fumigate, purify the air, administer medicine, and take medicine. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order to not become contaminated, and thus perchance inflict and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me. But, I have done what he has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but will go freely. This is a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash or foolhardy, and does not tempt God."* – Martin Luther

I believe the Church is the hope of the world, and we must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to a hurting world. But we also must be wise and practice diligence in that mission.

We believe in this first phase; we can offer worship gatherings again in a safe manner. We want to lead the way as a church in being selfless, caring, flexible, nimble, reaching and diligent, which means I am asking you as a Church to follow strictly the guidelines that the Church Board has set forth because of your **“love” for one another.**

Also, we are aware of the fact that COVID-19 is still a risk to certain members of our community, and we encourage the vulnerable to stay home and participate in church online as long as necessary. **Worshipping at a physical building does not mean a Christian has more faith or courage, just like worshipping from home doesn't make a Christian more careful or considerate of others.** We're not trying to prove anything except for how much we can love one another - even when our choices and opinions differ.

Matter of fact, the Lord spoke to my heart just the other day to start an online CLA campus which simply means that we are investing heavily into having all the technical capabilities to effectively minister to our congregation digitally. We are currently pre-recording our services but very shortly from now, we will move to our services being broadcasted LIVE. Glory to God!

Online Church will stream:

- Sundays @ 9 & 11 AM

On the front page of our website www.willimanticchurch.org, our church Facebook page, Instagram and other platforms, there is a link to all the details necessary for us to re-open safely. I just want to highlight a few of them in this letter to you.

Our sanctuary has been reset to allow for social distancing. We've measured and are observing the federal standards - six feet between family units. As you might imagine, that means our capacity has been greatly reduced. Governor Lamont just changed his executive order to allow 25% capacity of houses of worship or 100 people, whichever comes first. Our capacity will be 75 people per gathering per the state regulations in this first phase.

During phase one, we will have main services only. There will be no kids' ministry activities, nursery, or childcare. Midweek Bible study, groups and classes will not meet in person. These ministries are online only during the first phase. We fully anticipate all these being restored in phase two of the re-opening.

Practically, that means your kids are sitting with you in service. Don't stress. I understand there will be more noise and activity. We'll be OK. That is one of the reasons why we will be keeping our services to 1 hour in length during this time. However, if your child throws a fit or starts screaming, please consider taking them to the lobby until they calm down.

We are starting with three services a week:

- Saturdays @ 4:00 PM
- Sundays @ 9 & 11 AM

To help ensure that you have a place to sit, we have instituted an online sign up for services. **Please RSVP for the service you wish to attend at www.willimanticchurch.org.** Enter the number of family members who will be attending with you. When a service is full, we will no longer accept RSVP's for that service. If we need to add more services, we will.

We are asking for you to arrive no earlier than 15 minutes before the service begins. When you see the doors open, that will be your invitation to come into the church building.

When you enter the building, please find a pew to sit in and please sit with your family. Every other pew will be blocked off to ensure a 6 ft. distance between you and others. If you happen to sit on a pew along with another family, please distance yourself 6 ft. from you and them.

After service, we will dismiss people from back to front to ensure a quick, safe exit. We are asking for individuals and families to exit the building and feel free to fellowship in the parking lot where social distancing can be practiced.

I know you have a place where you always sit! This is going to be a good opportunity to practice flexibility! And you might enjoy experiencing service from a different point of view!

We have a number of **safety measures** that will be in place per our agreement with the State of Connecticut. Please know these are not done as the result of fear! Instead, we are doing everything we know to do to protect the most vulnerable among us and prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Our motivation is not fear, but love for others in our church family. I want to share with you eight of these steps.

- 1. To help prevent the spread of infection, we are asking (suggesting) people to wear a face covering/mask when a six-foot distance is unavoidable per the state regulations.** This does not apply to anyone for whom doing so would be contrary to their health because of a medical condition. Also infants and toddlers will not be required to wear a mask. Masks will also be provided to those who need them.
- 2. Common areas and gathering spaces of the building will be closed.** That includes the fellowship hall, water fountains and any place where people might congregate.
- 3. Before every service, the sanctuary, seating and all high-touch surfaces will be disinfected.** We will only allow people in the room after that procedure is complete.
- 4. Hand sanitizing stations are set up throughout the building.** We encourage their frequent use.

5. **If you need to sneeze or cough, please cover your mouth and nose or sneeze into your elbow.**
6. **We will be continually wiping down surfaces in the rest rooms and other high touch areas.**
7. **We will not distribute any bulletins or printed materials.**
8. **Offering buckets will not be passed.** We have mounted giving boxes in the back of the sanctuary for you to give in the Lord's tithes and offerings. You can also give online by going to www.willimanticchurch.org/give. Offering envelopes will be located at the giving boxes and the Next Step Desk to prevent multiple touches.
9. **We will not share hands, hug or high five.** Instead, we will air hug, wave and smile.
10. **Do not attend if you have any symptoms of any illness within the past 14 days.**

Finally and perhaps most importantly, if you are high risk because of age or underlying health conditions, I encourage you to stay home and continue watching online during Phase one. While I would love to see you face to face, **I love you – and want you to stay healthy!**

There is a lot of tension in our country; some want to open, others passionately believe everything should stay closed. Here's how we are going to approach it. **We will respect the thoughts and preferences of others and not make anyone feel lesser or non-spiritual because they have a different approach.**

Attending in person is not a sign that you are more mature, more godly, or more committed than the person who chooses to stay at home.

Staying at home does not make you smarter or more caring than the person who attends in person.

You've done a beautiful job of loving and caring for others the last three months. Let's keep that same attitude of love and concern as we transition into another new way of doing church.

We are not going to be the social distancing police. We will post the guidelines, communicate them often and encourage you to follow them. However, we are not going to walk around with a giant ruler to make sure you are six feet away from others. **I am asking you to follow the guidelines out of love for each other.**

We know that, for some time, church will look different while we practice spacing & sanitation safety measures. That's okay. We're flexible and adaptive. We've always taught that our preferences are secondary to our mission.

Our purpose is to rescue lost people who are far from God and currently living one heartbeat away from an eternity in Hell. Our goal is to raise up strong, confident, life-long followers of Jesus Christ. Our methods might change, but the message remains.

We live in a world that has fully woken up to the fact that life is fragile. People are looking for solid truth to stand on now that they've experienced how easily jobs, markets, personal finances, and health can crumble. **We're here to tell the world that HOPE and LIFE are found ONLY in Christ.** That's why we exist:

“Christian Life Assembly of God exists to effectively proclaim the full gospel of Jesus Christ so that we may see people who have no relationship with Christ come to Christ and discover the joy of knowing Him.”

We will continue in that mission through Church Online and resume that mission physically at 143 Windham Road, Willimantic, CT. We are ONE church and UNIFIED in our mission. Our doors are open for the person at the end of his or her rope and seeking a life-line. **This isn't about us. Everything we do is for God's glory and so that people far from God can experience new life in Jesus!**

I look forward to worshipping with you soon. In the meantime, I love you and I miss you.

Every Soul Matters to God!

Pastor Donnie J. Capps & Official Church Board