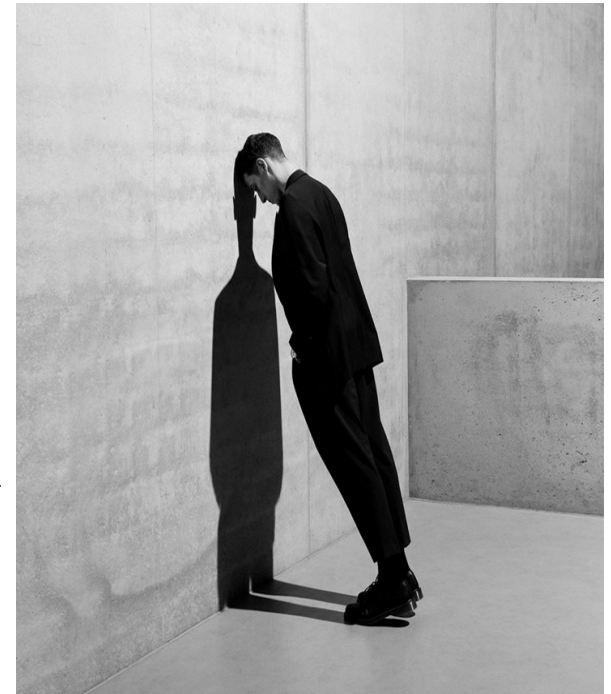


When will it end?

I miss you! I mean it, I'm not trying to be sappy or anything, but I miss our church services on Sunday mornings. I miss getting to visit with you and hear about your week. I miss hearing your joys and concerns. I miss people not laughing at my jokes. I miss singing off key with others. Worship has been one of the highlights of my week for years. And while I am getting more and more comfortable with our "virtual church" services, I still miss you.

As I've been thinking about what worship services look like today, being scattered and not able to meet together for worship, I am reminded that this isn't the first time things have been like this. Back in Biblical times, there were many occasions where public worship wasn't allowed or safe. After the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, the faithful didn't know where to worship. They scattered from one central location (Jerusalem) all over the region in an attempt to find safety. For nearly 300 years, early Christians could not legally gather together for worship. The first churches weren't dedicated buildings, but homes where the faithful would gather in secret to worship their Creator and Savior.



When I think about those scenarios, a few more weeks of "virtual worship" doesn't seem so bad. This morning (May 4), we received word from our Bishop, Robert Farr, recommending churches continue to meet virtually through the month of May. I must say this direction was both a relief and a disappointment. It was a disappointment because, like I said, I miss worshipping with you. It was a relief because I am little nervous about getting back together and making sure it isn't too early and that we make the best arrangements possible.

So for now, we continue to wait, knowing that the end of this season in our lives will come. We just aren't sure when at this point. I want to reiterate that we will let you know when our first in-person service is scheduled and that we are working to adopt the best practices possible to provide a safe and healthy environment for us to gather. But until then, we get to continue to meet virtually, which is an option I am so grateful to have.

It is an honor to be your pastor and be in ministry with you to a God who is present with us even when we are not with one another.

Blessings,

Chris

A Note from Pastor Tom

Greetings to you from Norfolk, Virginia!

This has been, and continues to be, an interesting year—a strange mixture of anticipation and excitement about our coming to be with you at Lake Lotawana Community UMC (LLCUMC) with the uncertainty and unsettledness caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Life events and planning have been turned on their head and cancelled—worship, graduations, weddings, family gatherings, and, in my case, a military retirement ceremony. Yet, as believers in our risen Lord and Savior, we still have hope about the future *despite* all that is swirling around us—and *within* us.

Over the past four months I have had time to reflect on my past experience as a UM pastor from 1991-2000, incorporate what I've learned as a Navy chaplain for the past 20 years, and think about what I can offer in the coming months and years after learning of my appointment to LLCUMC. I will share all that thinking and planning in due time, and I certainly will not do so right away.

I am thankful that pastoral transitions have changed since I left the Missouri Conference in 2000 to join the Navy. Currently, we are encouraged to have conversations with the current pastor of our upcoming appointment. Pastor Chris and I have started that process—what we call “turnover” in the military—and we will continue to talk in the coming weeks as things develop because of the pandemic.

One thing we have discussed is the virtual (online) ministry that began a few months ago out of necessity. The same is true for me and the Navy chapel program I oversee (both Protestant and Catholic) with my staff of chaplains and enlisted petty officers. As pastoral leaders, we have had a steep learning curve in regards to virtual ministry. In my case, I've had the help of my Leading Chief Petty Officer at the Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek Chapel and, at home, my lovely wife Jennifer who has expertise in marketing and social media. Regardless of the learning curve, Chris and I agree that an online ministry should continue at LLCUMC even after we are given the “all clear” for public worship. What that will look like is to be determined, but I mention this now—two months before my arrival (we hope) and in this open letter—for two reasons, and both are vital for continued ministry in the 21st century. ***First, the church's online presence is how most who are seeking a church home get introduced to our ministry, especially youth, young adults, and young couples.*** That is where their first impressions of LLCUMC are made, good or not-so-good, because they will visit our website and Facebook page before ever stepping foot into the church building. But that is not the only reason. ***Secondly, and given that only a very few do not have smart phones or tablets with video capabilities, virtual ministry it is a valuable means of outreach and connection to homebound church members, those that are sick or hospitalized, and current regular attenders who cannot be at LLCUMC on Sunday worship but yet want to remain connected from wherever they are.*** That is an overlooked, but equally important, reason. Churches must be online with a clear and consistent appearance and message, and we will be seeking your help in improving the online presence of LLCUMC in the coming weeks.

Jennifer and I are counting the days until we can be with you in person!

Yours in Christ,

Tom Statler

May 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
3 Services 10:00 Online	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 Services 10:00 Online	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 Services 10:00 Online	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Services 10:00 Online	25	26	27	28	29	30



Happy Birthday to all our
May birthdays.
Hope you have a wonderful day!

- Emily Morlan
- Jacob Moore
- Tres Reiss
- Anita McWhirt
- Katie Weeden
- Paul Campbell
- Bobbi McConnell
- Elain Raymond
- Sophie Reed

Jim Arr	Michael Hatfield
Roy Ball	Tara Leath
Les Case	Leticia and son Ethan
Donald Cohan	Derek Petty
Dorothy Conn	Steve Raymond
Wade Davis	Nancy Rowe
Chad Elmer	Larry Sparks
Janet Ford	Ray Trowbridge
Richard Fuerst	Elaine West
Winnie Fuerst	Family of Wilma Williams
Harvey Geary	Pastor Tom & Jennifer Statler

Congregation de Mellier
Heart and Soul Children's
Learning Center
All Ministries
of the Church