



The Epistle

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matt. 5:15)

A Look Back at How We Move Forward: Church Lessons from the 1918 Flu

This Article by Kristen Rogers, Features Associate Writer at CNN, appeared on CNN.com Thursday, December 3, 2020

To gather or not to gather has been the question at the forefront of the minds of today's religious leaders and their church members.

During the 1918 influenza pandemic that ultimately killed 50 million to 100 million people, different answers to that same question resulted in either collective well-being or widespread, devastating loss.

**“One Handshake
Away From
Heaven”**

The US Supreme Court recently decided 5-4 to grant religious organizations in New York state relief from restrictions on the number of people attending religious services. In light of this development, looking back a century can offer guidance for religious institutions deciding to stay shuttered or reopen.

In 1918, many churches around the world closed their doors to save lives. Without financial support, some churches eventually closed permanently, while others survived with dropped-off donations and serving as hospitals instead of sanctuaries. For some families, the home became the altar.

Those who refused to adapt to the pandemic reaped the consequences.

In Zamora, Spain, "mass gatherings were positively encouraged — and at 3 per cent, or more than twice the national average, Zamora had the highest death rate of any city in Spain," wrote science journalist Laura Spinney in her book "Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World."

In September, a local bishop rebelled against health authorities by ordering evening prayers for nine days "in honor of St. Rocco, the patron saint of plague and pestilence, because the evil that had befallen Zamoranos was 'due to our sins and ingratitude, for which the avenging arm of eternal justice has been brought down upon us,' " Spinney wrote.

On the first day, "he dispensed Holy Communion to a large crowd at the Church of San Esteban. At another church, the congregation was asked to adore relics of St. Rocco, which meant lining up to kiss them," she wrote.

"Organized religion shaped the pandemic much more obviously than now, and it was more likely to take precedence over public health," Spinney told CNN via email. "In the pages of Zamora's newspapers ... a notice announcing an upcoming mass at one of the city's churches was printed next to a warning to avoid crowds. Nobody seemed to notice the incompatibility of the two."

A month later, Spinney notes in her book, the bishop wrote that science had proven itself ineffective and that people were beginning to "turn their eyes instead toward heaven." People continued to attend gatherings in packed cathedrals and streets. When health officials tried to prohibit gatherings, the bishop accused them of interfering in church affairs.

By mid-November, Zamora had seen more illness and death than any other Spanish city. Although priests and parishioners lost their lives, Spinney wrote, the bishop praised those who had placated, in his words, "God's legitimate anger" by attending services. The bishop's followers didn't hold him accountable but rather revered him, and he was rewarded for his efforts and remained bishop for nearly a decade longer.

What people generally receive when attending religious services is a sense of comfort, spiritual community and grounding, said Dr. Christina Puchalski, the founder and director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality & Health in Washington, DC. "People have that sense of connection and belonging, and then in a transcendent sense, maybe the experience of God, however people understand that. Rituals can be very healing and faith, for many people, is their source of hope. ... That is what sustains them."

During the pandemic, the rug has been pulled out from underneath believers and there are few places where they — and really, anyone — can feel hope, Puchalski said.

"When it comes to religious services, it's more than going out to a restaurant," she said. "When you think historically, in countries where people were persecuted for their faith, people went to church or mosque or temple anyway, in spite of the possibility that they would be killed. Because that is so important to them. That is who they are at a very profound level."

"It is true that for a number of different religions, the creation of communities for rituals is incredibly important," said Stephen Covell, the chair of the department of comparative religion at Western Michigan University. "And if you can't come together to celebrate or worship or conduct whatever the ritual is, then it means you're unable to fulfill the teachings of that religion or ... the duties and responsibilities you have."

On the other hand, some churchgoers may have different beliefs about the severity of the pandemic and how to handle it, Puchalski said. And some vary in how they assess risk. Others might be fed up with isolation burnout, deciding that attending church is worth the risk and that if they catch coronavirus, maybe their sickness would be mild.

Denial is one coping mechanism that could give people subconscious permission to live life as normal. Any of those schools of thought could lead someone "to make decisions accordingly," Puchalski said.

The innovative spirit for reimagining religious services during pandemics didn't start in 2020.

Although much less technologically savvy, religious leaders and parishioners living during the 1918 pandemic devised ways to maintain both individual faith and community spirituality.

When influenza struck in Indiana in the fall of 1918, the second and worst wave of the 1918 flu, health officials imposed a statewide quarantine beginning October 6 of that year. Nevertheless, religious leaders took advantage of the opportunity to ingeniously unite and console their parishioners, wrote Casey Pfeiffer, a historian with the Indiana Historical Bureau, a division of the Indiana State Library.

The press, for one, acted as a sort of liaison between leaders and members: Through local papers, leaders stayed connected with members by providing hope and ways to practice their religion. Readers were encouraged to study scripture readings or Sunday school lessons, or worship alone or with family.

In a published statement, a reverend suggested that families pray at the same time that services were usually held. And once the quarantine was extended to the end of October, First Presbyterian Church in Rushville, Indiana, urged families to make Sunday "a day of prayer and meditation in their homes."

As the pandemic droned on, some newspapers shifted to having larger sections designated for guides to at-home Sunday services. In "Worship with the Star," a series by the Indianapolis Star newspaper, there was a full page that featured opening and adjourning hymns, scripture lessons and sermons.

One reverend worked with a telephone company to facilitate dial-in services. "There was that sense of responsibility and wanting to really make sure that religion remained a focus in people's lives," Pfeiffer said. "The past really informs us about the present and then, if we can, hopefully it inspires us to work toward a better future."

Though members and religious leaders figured out how to cope, not everyone was satisfied with the adjustments. "As we see today," Pfeiffer said, "there was some pushback against that; people who wanted to be in person."

Some church leaders hosted open air services, as they thought short meetings in sufficiently ventilated churches wouldn't seriously harm communities. Recognizing the danger, health authorities and law enforcement intervened in some places, either by discouraging the services, denying permission to have them or dispatching officers to meetings. At the height of the fall wave, some pastors and rabbis used their buildings as makeshift hospitals.

In late November 1918, some religious institutions slowly reopened while imagining the future of church — which included, for example, curtailing the length or number of services, mandating mask wearing and instructing preachers to dedicate a portion of their messages to guidance for proper ventilation in members' homes and workplaces.

"It was challenging then; it's challenging now," Pfeiffer said. "Religious leaders, both then and now, are trying to do the best that they can to meet their parishioners' needs, while keeping their safety and health at the (forefront) as well. There are definitely parallels to draw from and hope to be had."

Although we've had the carpet pulled out from underneath our feet, "there are many things that provide that sense of being grounded, sort of a replacement for that carpet," Puchalski said. There are "so many creative ways that I'm participating myself. I could go to Mass all over the world, because of YouTube. It's so neat to hear homilies from different places."

Today's believers have stayed connected via virtual Bible or prayer meetings, service livestreams, drive-in services and more. "Covid is still here; there's no really effective treatment, and there's no vaccine yet that's available," Puchalski said. "As long as that's the case, I would continue to follow the CDC (guidelines)."

Staying Spiritually
Connected -
Individually and
Together

The crux of the situation "ultimately boils down to a relationship with God," Puchalski said. "Yes, for many people, their faith is practiced in community, no question — a huge loss for many people for whom that is important.

"We get so caught up with that aspect of faith, however, that maybe we forget another way that we can honor that belief within us that just might be safer. And the bigger picture is, again, the relationship with God – the divine or sacred – however you understand it." ■

Looking Ahead

We hope we will be able to get together again in 2021! We miss you all and look forward to normalcy again. In the meantime, we pray for an effective vaccine to reach the people, and we will continue to gather remotely for worship until further notice. We will be sure to keep you updated on any plans to reopen and other ways we can be together while we are apart. Merry Christmas!

Adopt-a-Family Update:

We have a family to help!

The church will send out a wish list sign up in a separate email. Family info & shopping opportunities are listed for you below.

There are so many opportunities to give to our church's mission support during this season of giving! THANK YOU for the donations you gave to support the Korporate Kids Toys For Tots drive! And, in addition to the Adopt-A-Family mission, we will again be accepting gloves, hats, scarves, socks, jackets and cold weather essentials for people of all ages that we will bring over to the Food Pantry later this month.



Meet the Guarena Family: *Such a nice family!*

The Mom, Fatima, came from the Dominican Republic at age 13. She grew up in Jersey City and lived in Kearny before moving to Montclair where they currently reside together.

- ♦ Mom: Fatima, likes black, white and grey, and is a size Women's L/XL. Could use a white down comforter (Queen), sheets (Queen), and a winter coat.
- ♦ Daughter: Priscilla, age 22, likes pink and purple, and is a size Women's XL. In college remotely. Could use a winter coat.
- ♦ Daughter: Courtney, age 20, likes teal and orange, and is a size Women's L. Likes lights in her room. In college remotely. Could use a winter coat.
- ♦ Son: Joshua, age 12, likes blue, red and grey, and is a size Men's Small. Likes books and technology. Could use a red Twin comforter, curtains, winter coat.
- ♦ They shop at Macy's, JCPenney, Stop & Shop, enjoy a treat of pizza and TGI Friday's.



Holiday Craft Time Fun

Thank you for joining us for our Tom Turkey Thanksgiving craft! Although the experience was a bit unusual, being enjoyed remotely from home, a fun time was shared by all, and the crafts were a success. It was a great turnout and I am looking forward to the next one. I had hoped to get another craft going on Sunday, December 20th, but unfortunately, with the delays in the shipping, I will be unable to get the supplies together for everyone in time and get them to those who need it mailed. I am so sorry and promise we will do a wintry craft after the holidays when there is more time! Stay tuned for more information coming next year!

Hanging of the Greens

What a great idea it was to have a virtual Hanging of the Greens, complete with videos from us all explaining our favorite ornaments and holiday traditions. Thank you to everyone who participated! What brought on the idea was remembering how, in the past, our Hanging of the Greens in the church sanctuary and narthex would see us all gathering for a simple lunch, while enjoying each other's company, to celebrate the coming of this cheerful season.

This year however, since we could be together, our Virtual Hanging of the Greens was born. But, of course, the church itself could not be forgotten! On Saturday, December 5th, Jamie Lynn Adams added some greenery to the narthex (and even some lights!) and made sure the Sanctuary was not left out this year. Evergreen boughs were added to the communion table, a wreath was placed on the cross, and the Advent Wreath was positioned in its rightful place. On Sunday, December 6th, during our service and virtual HOG event, Jamie Lynn (and Baby Brian) and Cindy Coryell decorated our beautiful tree in the Narthex – special thanks to Chuck's Trees! We also added something new this year: Mike Adams put up some lights on the church sign across from the Fairview Ave traffic light. There are timers set for those and the tree so those passing by in the evening can see that we are here and ready to welcome Baby Jesus.

Joy to the World!

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Perhaps the most meaningful part of the Advent/Christmas seasons each year is the Candlelight Service on Christmas Eve. This year, like most things in our life, the service will be different, with this service of worship being shared online via Zoom meeting. And while that will be different for us, indeed, the broadcast will still include the traditional sharing of candlelight, and the beloved hymn, Silent Night. Our Christmas Eve Candlelight service will be held on Thursday, December 24th, at 7pm.

This year, much like our Virtual Hanging of the Greens, you are invited to participate in Candlelight Service by making a video to be shared during our Christmas Eve Online Gathering! And here's the plan to make it happen:

Please either take a video of yourself holding and "passing" a lit candle, or Pastor Todd can record a video of you via Zoom. If you would like to record your own video, please do so in the evening after it gets dark, and follow these steps with your recording:



First, set up your recording so that your head and torso are in the frame. Once recording, please hold your lit candle offscreen to your left, while looking at your candle. Then, bring your candle across your body until it is offscreen to your right, all the while looking at your candle. Lastly, bring the candle to your center, and look up at the camera. Each "move" should last 4-5 seconds (i.e., Left- hold for 4; Right- hold for 4; Center- hold for 4; Look up- hold for 4). Once you email your videos to Pastor Todd, they will then be edited together to make one candle-lighting video that will be quite meaningful and memorable.

If you would like Pastor Todd to record your video for you, please join the group Zoom Meeting on Tuesday, December 14th, at 6:30pm. Here's the Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89025286616>

Please have your *real* candle ready to go! You may dress any way you like, just as long as it's the way you would wish to be seen at a Christmas Eve Worship Service.

Looking forward to a meaningful service of worship with you to celebrate the greatest gift of all – a Savior born for us!

UPCCG is Seeking a Clerk of Session

Are you a good listener? Are you available to get together with folks from the church (online or by phone) about once a month? Are you looking for ways to discern where God is leading you and the United Church of Cedar Grove? Are you searching for ways to be of service to God, your church, and your community? Then the Session has been looking for you!

As we begin looking ahead to the new calendar year, we would love for you to join us as the Clerk of Session. We meet once per month (though we usually do not meet during the summer months) for roughly an hour after Sunday worship to discuss the business of the church. The Clerk of Session takes notes covering what takes place during the meetings and distributes those notes (or "minutes") to Session members before the next meeting, and helps to hold us accountable to following the teachings of our faith and God's leading as we seek to "make decisions that make a difference." However, there is nothing to fear! As you might expect from knowing us, we are a very low maintenance team. And, when life gets in the way, we are all-hands-on-deck to help one another.

Currently, this position is mostly being covered by Jamie Lynn who –as you well know– does a great deal in service to our church already, all while trying to maintain a job, a household, and raise a child. **We would be most appreciative if you would prayerfully consider answering this call in service to God and your church! We need you!**

We already love having you as a family member here at UPCCG...we would love even more to have you as part of our leadership team!



Stewardship and Offerings

Just a friendly reminder that we are still accepting your offering! You can mail it to church, drop it in Cindy's or Jamie Lynn's home mailbox (check the directory for our addresses), drop it off at church, or use our fancy new Donate button on our website (if you can spare the fee it costs as well, that's even more appreciated!). We need you now more than ever and appreciate everything that you, our compassionate and loving congregation do for us not only now but always. Thank you!

Gathering for Worship Online

Community and Communion on Zoom

As our community life is transformed in many ways, we are so grateful that we are able to worship each week via Zoom networking.

As you know, Session has suspended "in-person worship" until further notice. We will hold worship services online each Sunday at our usual gathering time of 10:00am. Invitations with the details for attending both the worship services and the weekly check-ins are sent out each week. Further information about our online worship gatherings, and recordings of previous gatherings, can be found on the [church website](#).

Our zoom gatherings allow folks to participate via desktop computer, laptop, smartphone with audio and video. A dial-in number is also available if you prefer to participate by telephone. I invite you to follow the [United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove Facebook page](#) and tune in each week.



Church Email Communication

Just a reminder for any email communication for UPCCG. Please utilize the below email addresses for anything you would normally send to the secretary. You may also copy Pastor Todd.

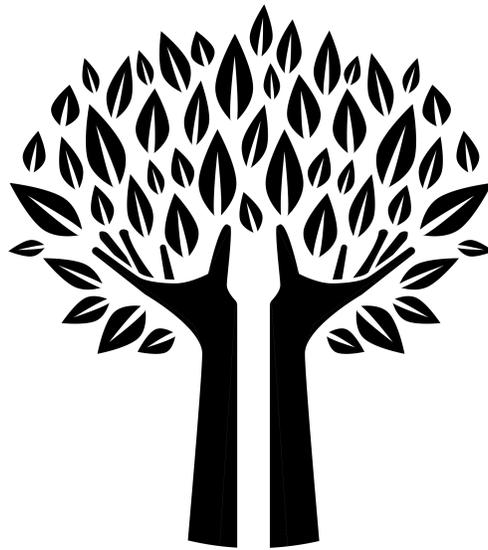
unitedprescg@gmail.com – email address goes directly to Jamie Lynn

- Any immediate needs to be address such as bulletin comments (please copy Todd on prayer requests and service requests as well)
- Epistle articles
- Flower requests
- Any secretarial needs or other housekeeping items to be aware of

theupccg@gmail.com – email address monitored by a few members of the church, and Pastor Todd

- Anything that the whole congregation would be interested in
- Newsletters/ publications you think we should be receiving
- Inquiries from outside the congregation

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**The United Presbyterian Church
155 Commerce Road
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An Inclusive Community of Christians
Rooted and Grounded in Christ Since 1959
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