

GATHERING TOGETHER AS ONE BODY

At the October 19 Church Council meeting, it was decided that we would continue to hold both Sunday morning worship services in Fellowship Hall, except for the 8:00 a.m. Communion service on the first Sunday of the month and the 9:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Communion Service. The Sanctuary upstairs will be open and heated on Sunday mornings with the worship service shown on our large-screen TV at 10:00 a.m. for folks who would like to worship there. The online poll (which can be viewed by [clicking here](#)) showed option #1 “All in Fellowship Hall” as the top choice.

Please read a portion of a letter written by Craig Modahl who was instrumental in our church’s decision to become an “Accessible to All” church years ago. Most of you know, Craig is an ordained UCC minister and served on the national Disability Ministries Board for several years. Craig’s subject line read, “Gathering Together as One Body”.

In 2009, our church became one of the first churches in the UCC to be designated as an Accessible to All (A2A) congregation. We went through a period of study, reflection, evaluation and planning to apply for that designation through the UCC Disability Ministries Board. We committed ourselves to do everything in our power to include the full participation of people with disabilities in the life of our church. We recognized that this was a commitment that would require continued attention through the years as accessibility continues to evolve.

With the elevator out of service, we have suddenly found ourselves in a difficult situation. We have lost one of the most visible elements of that A2A commitment – full access for everyone to our sanctuary. This is a temporary situation that will require a substantial financial commitment and patience to rectify.

It is not only the commitment we made 14 years ago that compels us to provide a temporary solution enabling everyone to gather together for worship, but also the commitment we have to each other – to those who come together every week – to fully participate in the life of our faith community. While it may be disappointing to relocate our services until accessibility to the sanctuary is restored, denying full participation in the life of our church to those with mobility restrictions would be a tragedy. Telling our friends that they will need to separate from the rest of the congregation is the equivalent of telling them to stay home so that we – the able-bodied members – are not inconvenienced. We are remarkably fortunate to have a beautiful space in which to gather during this time – Fellowship Hall.

We know it will take several months for the elevator to be repaired, bringing us through the season of Advent and Christmas. During this time of year, extended members of our families often join us in celebration. Some of those members will be elderly and people with disabilities. Dividing our families according to their physical abilities with the able-bodied walking to the sanctuary and those with limited physical access being directed to a separate space or telling them to stay home contradicts what gathering as one body means. We are a community, a body of Christ, wherever we gather together as one.

Signed, Craig Modahl