

**March 17, 2020**

Dear Friends,

Greetings to all of you in Christ!

These are crazy, difficult days for all of us. As spring approaches, we normally look forward to getting outside and gathering with family and neighbors. Getting outside is still a great idea – at least when it isn't raining. Gathering with people we love has gotten difficult. That means it's incumbent upon us to keep up with each other in other ways.

A great blessing to us in 2020 is that we now have a myriad of ways to connect with each other. Even if we can't be physically present, even if we have to wait a while to shake hands and hug, we can hear each other's voices and laughter, we can still see each other's faces. (Skype, Face Time, and Zoom are great ways to connect if you have a computer or smart phone.) That means we can keep many of our all-important relationships going.

What's most important right now is simply to minimize our contact with others for their sake and for ours. And doing so out of love for each other rather than out of fear for ourselves is the fine line that makes this bearable. Now, this may seem like a stretch, but it's less so that one might imagine. Here goes:

Since we're in the season of Lent, one way to approach this period of isolation is to incorporate it into our Lenten disciplines. What we must forego for the sake of those we love is something on which we truly depend as human beings. As we fast prayerfully from much of the personal interaction we're used to, we can use that time to pray for those whom we miss. We can give thanks to God for the people we know and who know us. We can trust that the people (all over the world) whom God has gifted to discover ways to fight the coronavirus are doing their work for the sake of all people. We can pray that leaders of all kinds and at all levels are receiving energy, stamina, support, and creative ideas for helping the people around them to deal with the stress, the anxiety, and the illness itself.

These suggestions may not be helpful to everyone, but in some way, all of us can find some new purpose and hope even in the midst of this trying experience. We're all in this together. So, as we muddle forward, keeping the well being of our neighbors as much in mind as our own, we are, as Jesus says, "[loving] one another as I have loved you."

On practical matters:

1. We will not hold public worship on March 22. I will work with Bill Reese to see if we might still offer some sort of virtual gathering on Sunday morning. The decisions to meet for worship will take place on a week-to-week basis. Watch your emails and the church website.

2. A new Emergency Response Team has begun to meet. It consists of:

-Carol Jernigan (parish nurse)

-Pauline Douglas (an elder and responsible for the "Safety" aspect of the Property/Safety Ministry Team)

-Karen Welch (an elder and a nurse practitioner)-

-Mark McCalman (an epidemiologist)

-Geoff Hoare (also with experience in public health crisis management)

-Pastor Allen (will be responsible for communications among the ERT, the Session, and the Congregation)

NOTE:

A) This team has not been officially approved, but a motion is before the Session right now, and a vote will happen today.

B) This team will serve in an advisory capacity only. All final decisions are the responsibility of the Session.

3. The Session asks everyone to remember that our bills still need to be paid. Please help us minimize the financial impact of this experience by mailing tithes and other offerings to the church. If you put "ATTN: Treasurer" on the envelope, we will know that it is an offering. Only designated counters will open envelopes marked accordingly.

In the meantime: "Fear not." Keep safe. Wash your hands. Pray for one another. Trust that God is in the midst of all things, creating new possibilities and new life through even the most difficult experiences.

In Faith, Hope, and Love,

Allen