

## Your Daily Church Epistle

### Tuesday, October 6, 2020

Hello church!

I am terribly sorry to write that the time has come for more COVID reminders. Our COVID fatigue is great, it still hurts to have had such an empty sanctuary for Barb Goossen's service, and sometimes I do not want to do what the bishop said I must do when he ordained me, "Take thou authority as an elder of the church." But if I have learned anything during 2020 it is to get the sad or difficult news over first, and then to end on a word of hope.

### The Sad and Difficult News

Our county COVID-19 rates continue to rise, so we must raise our vigilance. My primary source for COVID-19 data is the St. Croix County's public health page, <https://www.sccwi.gov/AlertCenter.aspx>. The raw numbers are found by clicking on "Data Dashboard." Since Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 346 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in St. Croix County. The week ending on Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 96 people tested positive, an average of 13.7 positive test results per day. The week ending on Friday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 117 people tested positive, an average of 16.7 positive tests per day. This past week that ended on Friday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 139 people tested positive, an average of 19.8 positive tests per day. Statistics posted on Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m. reported 50 people testing positive the first three days of this week, hopefully the beginning of a downward trend.

You will also find on the same web page, the current regulations in our county and state for COVID-19. Regulations for churches are found in the Faith Communities section, located the bottom of the page. On Monday I reviewed all appropriate posts on that page. Right now, we are fully compliant with everything St. Croix County requires and advises. Please let me know if you have fact checked me and see that I misread anything.

These regulations do not override our established civil laws about church property. Under civil regulations at all levels of government, church properties are considered private property owned by a religious voluntary association. Although United Methodists choose to live with open doors as if we were a publicly held property, with our American legal status all local churches retain the right to have stricter regulations than our government. This is the part of our American freedom of religion which allows some churches and denominations to exclude women from both ordination and lay leadership position without being subject to civil litigation for violating any woman's civil rights.

Because we are a "religious voluntary association" our members have the legal right to set higher standards than our local government. Membership matters on this point. Therefore,

when the Accountable Leadership Board decided unanimously that masks must be worn on our property, the city must enforce our regulation when leasing our building as a voting site. Everyone in our building should be wearing a mask. There is a lip-reading exception during worship, but worship leaders must use a microphone and stand 12+ feet away from others. Also, when Kathy is working alone in the office, she can have her mask off if her door is locked. Kathy is required to put her mask on whenever any of us walk into the office. Those are the only two exceptions for wearing a mask in our building.

Second, we are a United Methodist Church and have our own legal structure beyond our local church. For us to be open for Sunday worship, as the elder appointed to serve as your pastor I was required to file our plan with our district superintendent about how we would insure public health. There are two reasons we will suspend public worship in the sanctuary (1) because we are told to do so by St. Croix County Health officials, and (2) because we have a positive COVID-19 test result among our members and constituents who reside in Hudson. That clause “reside in Hudson” spares us from being closed due to a college student member who is currently not residing at home in Hudson.

### **What does this mean?**

- 1. When you are in the building, you must wear a mask.**
- 2. If the county health officials inform you that you have been exposed to COVID-19, the standard quarantine for exposure is 14 days.** Count the 14 days from the day the public health officials told you that you were exposed, not the day they contacted you. You are invited to let us know how we can support you with both prayer and service through your quarantine.
- 3. If you test positive for COVID-19, please contact the church office. First and foremost, we want to support you with prayer and physical assistance such as shopping as you and your family must practice social isolation. Second, if you have been in contact with other members, we need to know so we can collaborate with our St. Croix County Public Health Department as they do their contact tracing.** The difference between quarantine and social isolation is subtle. Quarantine prevents the spread of COVID-19 before symptoms are present and therefore has a firm timeline of 14 days. Social isolation is therapeutic and helps the infected person recover. Social isolation varies can and will vary in length depending on any other health conditions present in your household. The timeline for social isolation depends on a physician determined number of days following the last observable symptom.

Physicians on the evening news talk about “comorbidities.” These are other physical health diagnoses that often shorten life expectancy. For example, they point to

President Trump's age and observable obesity as comorbidities his treatment team should consider in their decision making. In addition to age and weight, other comorbidities include diabetes, heart disease, and lung diseases.

4. **If we do have a member or worshipper residing in the Hudson School District who tests positive for COVID-19, we will suspend in sanctuary worship and offer worship outdoors as the weather allows until we are 14 days past the recovery of all members who test positive.** Podcast worship is here to stay even after the pandemic is over. Too many shut-ins are blessed by this service.

Thank you for reading to this point. Bless you all for loving your neighbors by doing what you can to keep us all safe from COVID-19.

## **A Word of Hope**

Our word of hope for today comes from Philippians 4:8,9.

“From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.”

These are the last two sentences of our Scripture for this coming Sunday's worship. As I read them here in my studio at home, what comes to my mind is something from *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Changing our habits takes being 1% better at doing something today than we were yesterday. And if we keep working on being better every day, the results multiply daily. It works in exercise. It works in music performance. It can also work in your spiritual life.

How can you and I improve our practice at focusing on what is true, holy, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise? The journal keepers among us have a suggestion, make a daily focused journal entry observing these thoughts as a bedtime routine. That is a beautiful suggestion. But what if, like me, you are a morning person, or like some I know find it difficult to write, say due to a tremor?

Here is a suggestion I have used that does not require a specific bound journal. Take a single sheet of blank paper—from a legal pad, printer paper, or lined notebook paper—fold it in quarters and tuck it into your Bible at Philippians 4. You can also adapt this to use either scrap paper as prisoners of war often do, or your word processor. At whatever time works for you—morning, noon or night—open your Bible, re-read Philippians 4:8-9 and note things in your living that were true, holy, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise in the 24 hours before.

Do not fill the entire page, just one quarter of one side. Do another quarter every day for seven days. Then when seven days are done, on the eighth day review your week (even if it takes you eleven days in calendar time) and see how you have grown in your practice of keeping your thoughts in line with our Creator's thinking. I would love to hear how one of these ideas works for you to turn this time of aloneness into a time of growing in your faith.

Today let us pray for all who have tested positive for COVID-19, including President Trump along with our 419 neighbors in St. Croix County who are now recovering from infection.

Grace and peace be with you all,

Rev. Dawn