



St. Paul's United Methodist Church

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13 March 2020

Dear Friends,

This morning I met together with members of our St. Paul's staff team with regards to precautionary responses to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Our initial hope and plan had been to proceed with Sunday worship services with special attention to recommendations from public health officials regarding interpersonal interactions and hygiene. But, as I've often found: "life is what happens when we are busy making other plans."

As we met, we learned the Coronado School District would be suspending classes through April 6. We also learned that several churches in our area had suspended services. Finally, we had specific direction from the San Diego Department of Public Health that gatherings of 250 be cancelled at least through March 31 and that smaller gatherings observe a practice of keeping a distance of 6 feet between persons (families excepted). As the Public Health office noted, "***The timely implementation of aggressive strategies that create social distance and those that reduce close contact of people not regularly together, including limiting gatherings, has proven effective in prior pandemics at delaying rates of transmission and reducing illness and death.***"

Given the information coming out of the Center for Disease Control and all other credible public health sources, we know that we are nearer to the beginning of this epidemic than its end, yet without knowing how it will impact our community. With all this in mind, and out of loving concern for the most vulnerable in our church and community, we have decided to suspend in-person Sunday worship gatherings through March. We are also suspending all non-essential meetings on our church campus through April 4. (Different staff members will be communicating directly to their various groups and constituencies with more specific information.)

I cannot begin to express how difficult it is to implement such an unprecedented action. It feels unreal, and as some are sure to say, an overreaction. Still, knowing that our primary motivation is rooted in love of God and neighbor, our priority must be to enlarge -- rather than to suspend -- our practice of faith. As Martin Luther wrote in the midst of the plague in 1527:

I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.

With all of this in mind, we invite you to **worship online every Sunday at 10:00 am.** (You might even turn this into something fun for your family: "Pajama Worship".) The service can be accessed on our home page at www.stpaulsmethodist.com. The recording of this service should then be available by early afternoon. If you need technological guidance, please email meganpontes.spministries@gmail.com or call the church office at 619-435-5691. As a staff team we are brainstorming ways to be in contact regularly with members throughout this time. We do not want to lose touch with anyone as a result of this epidemic. We will look to find other ways to connect with each other so that no one feels alone or apart.

Good News. Great Joy. All People.

Rev. Robert D. Fuesler, Senior Pastor