

THIRD CHURCH NEWS

STAYING CONNECTED WHILE STAYING APART

April 20, 2020

Inaugural Edition . Issue 1

Hello with Love from your **Third Church Staff**

—AMY LUNN, CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR

In a place where the halls should be full of people and activity, there is a very big silence. Halls are dark. Doors are locked. Almost everywhere you look reinforces that things are definitely not normal. No, not normal at all. And most definitely much too quiet.

But, take a peek under this blanket of quiet and you'll see a thriving community of meetings, Bible studies, book clubs, children's ministries, youth groups, and worship. And behind the scenes we are all there, and, like you, adjusting to this new reality. Kristen keeps the business side of things running with assistance from Dave Vanderwel; Mark Faga has been tackling projects long-sidelined by busyness; Kent, Kama, Linda, Joyce, Hunter, and

Amy have been thrown into a whole new world of online meetings and services; Janelle and Angel are combining online activities with the real-world needs of congregants.

We miss you. We miss chatting in the hallways; the hug, high-five, or handshake we would have with you; we miss singing with you and gathering with you. And we love to see your faces when we meet now online. Your smiles, waves, greetings, and participation are wonderful. We can only hope you are fed by this as much as we are.

None of us are sure, exactly, what the coming months will hold. What we are sure of is this: it is a blessing to be a member of Christ's body with all of you. And all the social distancing in the world can't change that, and won't keep us apart.



Church Life Update

—PASTOR KENT FRY

Thank you for the great participation in our Holy Week Services as we came together for worship on-line to share the Lord's Supper, meditate beneath the cross of Jesus, and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning!

We counted over 190 computers on Maundy Thursday for worship and nearly 200 for Easter Sunday morning. We think that there were about two and a half people per computer for Easter, so we had a large number of people not only in Holland but in distant places in the United States and around the world celebrating the resurrection of Jesus with us. Our church attendance may actually be growing!

These are difficult and strange times for the entire world. We are currently discerning as church leaders the best way to negotiate the stay at home order and social isolation as we give witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. We deeply appreciate the congregation extending the band-width of mercy and grace as we communicate "the old old story of Jesus and his love" through unfamiliar mediums to many of us.

The pastors, staff, and lay leaders would like to update you on our current church life and mission as we begin a period of discerning when and how we return to corporate worship:

1. Consistory was not scheduled to meet in April, but we had a

special meeting via a conference call to discuss how we handle the lifting of stay in place orders. We conferred with Dr. Charlotte Heideman to determine current medical thinking in Ottawa County. Consistory made provisions in terms of technology equipment that can help us be flexible in terms of broadcasting our worship through on-line platforms from the sanctuary.

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2. Feedback from the congregation and from worship committee members, as well as discernment in our study of our country and culture, indicate that we will never return to exactly the way it was prior to the pandemic.

The country will move to more on-line platforms; retail business will shift; the way we greet one another will probably lead to new forms of gestures of hospitality. As a church we will need to incorporate some of these changes into our own life together. There will be a new normal and it may continue into new seasons of stay in place orders until a vaccine is found.

3. When we come back to corporate worship, we may need intermediate steps such as people who open the door; hymnbooks that can carry the virus may have to be temporarily set aside; and we may have to deploy social distancing in the pews. We will need to limit the number of people in the sanctuary. Even if we reinstitute corporate worship, there are some members of the congregation who have compromised immune systems or who are in at-risk category in terms of health; therefore, we may need to continue to provide an on-line live version of our worship service.

4. In the year ahead, we will want to defer to our public health officials and their suggestions for how and when we return to public and corporate worship. We have resources of wisdom within the congregation about how to implement good public health.

5. We know that the American and world-wide economy has been greatly impacted by this pandemic. It may give us an opportunity as American Christians to empathize and enter into the vulnerabilities of many of our third world brothers

(Church Life Update, Continued)

and sisters around the world. While hearing their stories, we also have congregational members and neighbors who have lost employment, face difficulty paying bills; therefore we will need to “do good to all, especially those of the household of faith.”

6. Feedback from the congregation, staff, and visitors

indicate there are some benefits to our on-line worship in terms of participation and the live dialogue aspect of worship that we may wish to permanently incorporate into the life of our liturgical congregation. We will not simply go back, but rather seek to incorporate some of the positive aspects of virtual worship into our traditional worship life.

7. Even with lifting of stay at home orders, we are not going to

go back to the way it was; therefore on-line platforms are going to be a primary means of communication. Many members of our congregation are not currently set-up to handle this on-line world because of lack of internet connection, slow moving computers, and technical skills. We must commit as a church to helping members get the necessary equipment and the training to work the church internet platforms. Overcoming social isolation is a paramount ministry objective of our congregation.

I will stop with seven points, which is rather biblical. I am often asked, “When are we coming back to church?” We don’t know the answer to that at the current time, but we will probably opt for easing into a return to “normalcy” rather slowly. Call the church office if you have questions and continue to check out

the church web site at www.trcholland.org. There are also regular Facebook posts on a weekly basis. Many Bible studies and discipleship ministries are meeting via Zoom, and the links are on the church website. Worship can also be accessed via a recording on the media page and through public access TV.

Finally, for me personally, the pandemic crisis has reminded me of the importance of the corporate body of the church. We can live our faith with Jesus in a deeply personal way, which many of us have been doing in our homes. But we need each other, which we are doing to the degree possible. And we long for the day when we can be together in person so that our faith is further strengthened and encouraged in order to be the light of Christ in a difficult world.

The Season of Easter: “Coming Together”

Before the disciples became apostles and saints, they were simply a group of friends coming together to hear and tell one another a story for which there are no words. We share the great story of the resurrection of Jesus in a safe environment so that we can share the story of Jesus in word and deed in the world.

We follow passages from *Feasting on the Word* while following the Revised Common Lectionary.

April 19	2nd Sunday after Easter	“Understanding the Resurrection of Jesus Together”	Acts 2:14a 22-32
April 26	3rd Sunday after Easter	“Jesus with Us at Sunday Church”	Luke 24:13-35
May 3	4th Sunday after Easter	“All Who Believed....Together” <i>Celebration of the Lord’s Supper</i>	Acts 2:42-47
May 10	5th Sunday after Easter	“Forgiveness Amidst Persecution”	Acts 7:55-60
May 17	6th Sunday after Easter	“The Air We Breathe”	John 14:15-21
May 24	7th Sunday after Easter	“Jesus’ Farewell Prayer” <i>Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons</i>	John 17:1-11



10:00 AM Sundays - Children’s Time via Zoom.
11:00 AM Sundays - Interactive Worship via Zoom.
Visit www.trcholland.org to connect with us!