A MESSAGE FROM DR. HOOD
Senior Pastor

Certainly, these are uncertain times we face as a nation and throughout the world. The Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) is a global pandemic. Protocols suggested by the Center for Disease Control must be taken seriously to protect each other and, hopefully, flatten the rise of illnesses and death. First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach is a high-touch faith community. Handshakes, hugs, and handholding of little children and elderly people are a natural expression of the relationship we have with one another. But, that is under normal circumstances. This time in our life is not normal and changing how we relate to one another is difficult. Yet, we now must alter our practices so that we may reduce the odds of the virus negatively impacting our community.

There is a crucial difference between fear and prudence. Christians should never be motivated by fear, not when we confess the power of the risen Christ who is present and active in the world. The Bible, on the other hand, encourages prudence. Particularly in the Book of Proverbs, God’s people are urged to exercise wisdom and the dangers of behaving foolishly are shared. Prudence compels us to join our nation’s extraordinary efforts to minimize contact between people in order to slow the spread of this virus. That is why during our live streaming of the worship services there will never be more than ten people in our Sanctuary. Additionally, during the service, each person present in the Sanctuary follows the social distancing protocol that is recommended by the CDC.

During this time, your governing board, the Session, made two important decisions. First, we want to care, within the capacity of our resources, for those members of the church who are negatively impacted by the virus. Some have had their wages reduced and others have lost their jobs. The Session has established a Member Support Fund for this purpose. Those who have any financial needs that are the result of this pandemic may contact Nancy Fine or one of the pastors so that we may determine to what capacity we may provide assistance. Naturally, anyone who has the capacity to donate to this fund joins with the Session in providing much needed support for those who are struggling.

The second decision made by your board is that we will continue to honor fully our pledged financial support of non-profit agencies that support vulnerable people in our community. This is a faith-driven decision made with the full awareness that financial support of our church has already dropped as a result of this pandemic. Yet, just this week, Nancy Fine shared with me an encouraging phone call she received. One of our most generous financial givers called to say they were increasing their support of our church at this time. They recognized that some would be unable to give as they had planned. Their desire was to help close the gap so the church would remain strong in its continuing ministry.

As I close, I ask that each of you not neglect your relationship with Jesus Christ. Read the Bible each day. Supplement your quiet time with God with a devotional from an author you trust. Quality devotionals bring insight and wisdom from others who are on a faith journey – insight and wisdom that strengthen our own ability to hear God. If you are not presently subscribed, I urge you to subscribe to my weekly devotional, Nurture Faith. There is no cost to receive the meditations, via email, on Friday or Saturday morning. Additionally, you will find on our website over two hundred of these meditations that my son, Nathanael and I have prepared over the last eight years.

With gratitude for the opportunity to be your pastor,

Dr. W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
Time Well-Spent

I recently listened to a podcast about the ramifications of COVID-19 on the film and TV industry. One of the hosts commented that this is the time where we will all see if we’ll really get around to that TV show we’ve been meaning to watch. You know the one. The one your friends rave about and you’re interested in but you just haven’t gotten around to because life’s just too busy. Then the host brought up the Netflix show Narcos which has been sitting there on his queue untouched for several years now.

Friends, it occurs to me that we’re at a very similar moment with our faiths. There may never again be a moment where each one of us collectively has this much idle time, and there may never again be a moment in our lifetimes where the whole world pauses with this level of uncertainty. It seems to me that there’s a blessing in all this. Where the axis of idle time meets the axis of an uncertain future, a blessing is formed.

What are the spiritual disciplines you’ve been meaning to practice but just haven’t quite gotten around to? What are the acts of devotion those at church rave about that you’re interested in but just haven’t carved out the time for? Is it prayer? Journaling? Fasting? Maybe it’s developing a daily practice of reading scripture. Maybe it’s using that devotional that’s been collecting dust by your nightstand.

My guess is there’s at least one spiritual program you’ve been meaning to watch, one new act of devotion that’s been sitting in your queue for months, if not longer. Consider what it would mean for your well-being during this uncertain time if you were to incorporate just one of these practices into your life. Consider what it would mean for your mental and emotional state if you were to recommit yourself to God; if you were to listen to God, trust in God, and spend time with God during this season.

Friends, even though you may be bored, there is a lot competing for your attention these days – much of it very worthwhile. But spending time with God is the absolute best thing you can do for yourself, for your family, for your country, and for your world. Time with God is time well-spent.
First Presbyterian Church is all about caring for our members. Each family is experiencing different difficulties and challenges in this uncertain time. You as parents and guardians have your hands full. Children are home from school. Children do not have access to all the social opportunities they normally have. Children are bored but they are also finding this time scary. In the next couple of weeks, we are going to try to be a resource for your children. We are looking into several fun options such as live streaming and zoom calls. More information will be coming on this.

It is our prayer that this time in the life of our world is short. We want to be available to you throughout this world crisis. The church will be live-streaming Sunday messages at 10 a.m. You can access this at www.firstdelray.com. Pastor Doug and Pastor Greg will be doing video blogs several times a week. The Session has set up a fund for families and individuals who are experiencing financial crisis. If you would like to contribute to this or if you need help, please contact the office.

I would like to recommend a couple of ideas.
• Although being connected to the world is important, monitor what your children are seeing and hearing. Too much information is frightening to us as adults, it can be really damaging to our children.
• Keep reminding yourself and your children that even though this is hard, God is with us. We may not understand what is happening and we may have questions as to why bad things are happening, but we want to remember again and again that God loves us. God walks with us. God is with us even in the midst of bad times. It is okay to ask hard questions, God is bigger than our questions.
• Read the Bible together, pray together. I have ordered a great Bible resource that I will be sending out as soon as it comes in. It is called Friends with God Devotional. This resource has wonderful Bible stories in it as well as an app which connects the children to Bible character cards and fun games to play.

Don’t tell … before Easter, I will be mailing out a surprise package to all the children which will include their own Easter Egg Eggstravanza Hunt. Eggs, games and activities. Shhh… it is a surprise.

A couple of weeks ago, I ordered a book called When Your Kid is Hurting, by Dr. Kevin Leman. He is a new author to me but I wanted to share a couple of his insights.
• Give your child the gift of as much childhood as possible.
• Answer only the questions asked.
• Provide balance.
• Solicit your child’s thoughts and solutions.
• Create an environment of safety.

I also like that he added that we can tell the truth, but it is important for us to balance what our children are hearing. I think this is true for us all!

I also really love what Mr. Rodgers said many years ago. In the midst of a crisis, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people are helping.” In the proper conversation, be sure to always look to those people who are helping!

TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

**Clean your hands often**
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

**Avoid close contact**
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

**Throw used tissues** in the trash.

**Immediately wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

**Wear a facemask if you are sick**
- If you are sick: You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes, and people who are caring for you should wear a facemask if they enter your room.
- If you are NOT sick: You do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick (and they are not able to wear a facemask). Facemasks may be in short supply and they should be saved for caregivers.

**Clean and disinfect**
- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean them:
  Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.