



LUTZ

Love Letter

May, 2020



WE ARE STILL
THE CHURCH

lutzcommunitychurch.org



The Presbytery of Tampa Bay

455 Scotland Street, Suite 1, Dunedin, FL 34698

April 30, 2020

Dear Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Clerks of Sessions,

In the earliest days of our Safer-at-Home journey we comforted ourselves with the assurance that whenever we came back together, we would celebrate Easter. We would have a big party. We let ourselves dream of full churches filled with song and music and hugs and laughter and children and joy. We held tightly to the promise that while this path was uncharted, it would be brief, and we would soon go back to normal. Beloved, we will not go back. There will be no return to our previous lives. It is unclear where this crisis is leading us, but it will be forward, not backward. We will not go from “home” to “together” like turning on a light switch no matter what anyone says. We are living with the reality of this quarantine and this pandemic for longer than any of us could possibly imagine just four, five, or six weeks ago. As we learn more about the progression of the illness, the fervent efforts toward cure, and the realities of the next months, it’s become increasingly clear that understanding our unique realities and our common bonds will have to sit at the forefront of what it means to be church in this new normal. That scenario of rapidly full sanctuaries is a sweet fantasy. There will be a holy party but it is pretty far into the future. Many of our daily routines are new and rapidly becoming normal. Our attentiveness to recognizing and providing safe options for the most vulnerable among us is essential, and quite honestly, that involves more than half of our membership. We are not merely making temporary concessions to them. We are honoring God’s beloved community by being as welcoming as possible with our invitation to worship God and be in full communion with one another, in as full a range of platforms and opportunities as possible. We are being faithful to our mission as we seek alternative methods to loving and serving our neighbors. We are discovering new purpose. Certainly, there are technical steps to making sure all are safe from harm as Covid-19 runs its course. There are also theological discussions that should be taking place, too. There is no scenario in which it is safe for all people to suddenly come out of hiding. I think this season of gradually peeking out and tentatively figuring out what is needed for particular contexts in this in-between time is perhaps the most challenging for us right now. The Wisconsin Council of Churches has developed a set of resources on “returning to church” that many of our Presbyterian relatives are considering among the most thoughtful and helpful of all that have been circulating. Presbyterian News also published an article featuring a pastor and an executive presbyter which captures some of the issues well. I also saw an article from Christianity Today on April 23 which gives additional perspective on the demographics that, as the article says, “make sanctuaries a risky place for gatherings to resume.”

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In the email Page 2 of 4 bringing this letter to you, Bill Wildhack is including links to each of these and other pieces with more food for thought as we move forward. Your Presbytery staff is also assembling some thoughtful ideas for conducting small group worship gatherings with common liturgical elements and ideas for your consideration. We are also monitoring what is coming out of national, state and local officials. Friends, this is not about religious liberty. It is about being faithful and responsible with our liberty. It is an amazing time to be a Gospel witness. I am reminded with nearly every email I open these days of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, in which he said, "I have the right to do anything, you say—but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others." (1 Corinthians 10:23-24, NIV.) And there's also this pretty direct warning from Jesus at the end of a famous encounter with the devil in Luke 4:9-12 (NRSV): Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Essentially Jesus is saying don't intentionally do something irresponsible, careless, or just plainly stupid with the assumption that you will not have to pay the consequences of your actions. That is in fact testing God and that is sin. Thank you for being open, creative, faithful and steady as leaders in this pandemic crisis. As we begin to hear news from civic, scientific, and medical community leaders about guidelines to "reopen" I hope you all will also apply scriptural foundations to anything you may consider for the life of your church and your family. This cannot be like an on-off switch. I will be more like a dial that will be adjusted for a long time. Continue to be motivated by love for God and for people. As much as some want to be physically together in the same space to worship or conduct meetings, we need to proceed with utmost care for others. And we must respect and honor those who are just not ready to jump into being physically present (including some of our pastors). I have also been keeping in touch with those who serve as chaplains in healthcare facilities within the bounds of the Presbytery and was glad to receive this from the Reverend Jenny Sumner Carswell, ACPE Certified Chaplain and Educator at Tampa General Hospital earlier this week: "As chaplains, we work collaboratively alongside medical staff to ensure that our COVID19 patients receive world-class medical treatment accompanied by spiritual care via phone and iPad. While I am speaking from only one experience, I know chaplains throughout our presbytery are providing phenomenal care in their medical centers. From a medical standpoint, we were told that if it looked like we overreacted, that means we did our job. But this virus does not discriminate - we've seen patients ranging from age 1-100 in our hospital. We are still seeing new patients every day, some of whom are here for non-COVID-19 issues but who are coming back positive. Social distancing slowed the spread, but this virus is far from over. We wear masks daily. It is not to protect ourselves, it is to protect those around us. Jesus teaches us whenever we have done something to the least of these, we have done it unto him. I personally see it as a Christ-like action to wear my mask and protect the vulnerable around me. My hand washing? A reminder of my baptismal vows. So does that mean we live in fear? No. It means we need to take great caution in when and how we reopen. In the last 2 months, I have worshiped in more "churches" during this COVID-19 season than I ever would've been able to do otherwise. You all are doing a phenomenal job! Know that doing the hard work of moving services online and out of sanctuaries did help slow the spread of the virus. Weekly, my five-year-old drives his garbage truck into the living room to witness a traditional worship service barefoot with a handful of goldfish. I told a patient yesterday that while they are in physical isolation, they are emotionally and spiritually supported beyond their wildest imagination. That if the love, encouragement, and prayers were tangible objects filling the space, the walls would burst at the seams. While the virus is still working to be contained, the Spirit of God is on the loose. Well done, good and faithful servants."

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As public health and civil authorities continue to recommend, I still strongly recommend that groups over 10 do not gather in person until further notice. These things, too, should still continue: those who meet in person practice social distancing (at least 6 feet apart and wear face masks); don't even think about coming close together; clean before and after every encounter, and that staff and clergy minimize time onsite. I strongly recommend you spend time with these detailed questions which some of you may have seen on the Internet before resuming anything in-person, and please be guided well by theological exploration and prayer as you do so. Go slowly, gracefully, and deliberately, please. I know you miss being together. I do, too. God has given us a remarkable time to relearn who and whose we are in this Eastertide season. The Presbytery office remains closed to public access until further notice, and when we begin to allow staff to work at the office, we will start with no more than two people present at a time and staff will wear face masks anytime we are at the office. You should also have already heard that the Presbytery meeting scheduled for May 16 was canceled by the Coordinating Team. Options are being considered for the conduct of the August 27 Presbytery Stated Meeting, and the 224th General Assembly of the PC(USA) will be conducted in June in a very abbreviated form via digital platforms. The Church will survive this and be better for it.

This is a liminal season, a threshold moment in which we are in between what was and what is to become. It is the season to experiment and learn. We feel disoriented before we can become reoriented. It's inconvenient, even irritating, for some of us, and it's really, really hard for others. I believe with all my being that if we are prayerful and thoughtful and deliberate, not only will we learn that we are capable of more than we ever thought possible, but that the church we are growing into is stronger, more resilient, and more capable of responding to our broken and hurting world than we give it credit for.

God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

God's peace and Eastertide blessings,



Patrice Hatley
Presbytery Coach & Coordinator

A Prayer for Inner Strength

Dear God,

Please give me the strength
to endure this situation,
and to find the blessings
and lessons that it contains.

Please give me the endurance
to continue ahead.

Please guide my thoughts,
words and actions,
so that I walk your
path of peace and love.

Amen



Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak



It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.

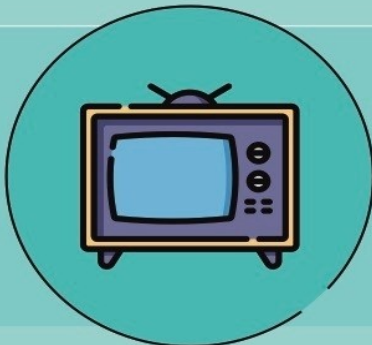
If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.



Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.



Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.



YOGA POSES FOR STRESS RELIEF



1. Child's Pose



2. Head to Knee Forward Bend



3. Bridge Pose



4. Cow Pose



5. Standing Forward Bend Pose



6. Easy Pose



7. Dolphin Pose



8. Eagle Pose



9. Cat Pose



10. Corpse Pose



11. Puppy Pose



12. Extended Triangle Pose



13. Legs Up the Wall Pose

DON'T FORGET TO Clean Your Hands

Handwashing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infections!



Stress relief activities



- Read a good book
- Watch a your favourite film
- Engage your visual senses in painting or photography
- Allow yourself to day dream for 10 mins
- Use visualisation techniques
- Evoke good memories from look at memory or story board



- Burn some aromatherapy oils
- Enjoy the aroma of scented candles
- Do some baking - the mixture of aromas and soothing movements
- Enjoy outdoor smells from walks in the country or near the sea...
- Freshly brewed tea or coffee

Engage one or more of your senses to relieve stress



- Sit outside and enjoy the sounds
- Listen a a favourite piece of music
- Listen to some sounds, lapping water
- Listen to a motivational recording
- Play a relaxation cd
- Listen to a radio programme with your eyes closed

- Sing
- Laugh

Have a chat with someone who listens

- Chew a piece of sugarless gum
- Use deep breathing exercises
- Eat a piece of dark chocolate
- Use deep breathing exercises
- Repeat affirmations out loud

Exercise

Squeeze a stress ball

Stroke a pet - particularly cats, dogs, rabbits

Wear soft warm clothing.
Bake - enjoy the soothing, repetitive movements

Play a musical instrument

- Have a massage
- Yoga or pilates



PSALM 31: 1-6

For the leader. A psalm of David.

In you, Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me;
incline your ear to me;
make haste to rescue me!
Be my rock of refuge,
a stronghold to save me.

For you are my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me.
Free me from the net they have set for me,
for you are my refuge.

Into your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, Lord, God of truth.

Prayer for anxiety and stress

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Oh Lord,  
Let me hear you.  
My soul is weary.  
Worry, fear, and doubt,  
Surround me,  
On every side.

...

Yet your sweet mercy  
Cannot be held back  
From those that cry out to you,  
Hear my cry.

...

Let me trust in your mercy.  
Show me how. Free me.  
Free me from anxiety and stress.  
That I may find rest  
In your loving arms.  
Amen.



To our friends & family in the medical field, we thank you for your tireless efforts at your God-given gift to aid those affected by COVID-19.

Our gratitude overflows to you & our prayers are with each of you.



BIRTHDAYS

&

ANNIVERSARIES

Dominic Bruno 5/1

Shirley Knapp 5/4

Riley Grimsley 5/6

Sandra Rector 5/6

Karli James 5/7

Brice Hanson 5/8

Debra Herline 5/8

Sophia Shepard 5/9

Dennis Ledford 5/10

Betty Suydam 5/10

Tony Linville 5/11

Harper Randles 5/19

Cheryl Kobres 5/22

Wanda Bishop 5/25

Mark Rose 5/25

Dave Thompson 5/25

Bern Jurgiel 5/27

Malachi Hanson 5/29

Beth Moore 5/29

Anniversaries:

John & Kathy Goolsby 5/8

Cheryl Kobres 5/25



STAY  
**UP TO DATE**

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Check out what's going on around the church with our live time calendar!

<http://lutzcommunitychurch.org/calendar>

