

Church in the Time of Coronavirus

From: Pastor Sarah McCann

Date: Monday, March 16, 2020

Dear members and friends of Hope UCC,

As you are aware, the presence of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in our nation continues to spread, as it does around the world. Recommendations on how to be both safe individually as well as prevent the spread of the virus communally continue to increase, with rapid changes. Your Church Council met yesterday to discuss how best to follow the guidance of health officials as well as find ways to keep us connected as a caring, compassionate church family. Out of an abundance of caution, we are taking the following steps to help protect everyone's health, safety, and well-being. Please be aware that this is a fluid situation, and these steps are subject to change based on new information.

Primary Decision

Our Church Council, with reflection, prayer, and on the advice of medical professionals, has made the difficult decision to cancel all in-person groups here in our facility through April 3rd. This will include worship, education, ministry teams and outside groups. The Council will meet the week of March 30th to reassess and make further decisions. The recommendation from the CDC to limit gatherings for the next 8 weeks was made later in the day, so was not part of the Council discussion. With this new information, please know that it is likely that Council will decide to extend these cancellations, at least in terms of in-person worship. A final decision will be shared after the above-mentioned Council meeting.

Worship

Worship is at the heart of a faith community, whether we are gathered together in body or spirit. We will be having abbreviated weekly worship services via Facebook Live at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays March 22nd and March 29th. Please note that this service will include prayers, scripture, brief sermon and perhaps a hymn or two, all from Pastor Sarah at her desk. We are preparing for this to continue further as needed. We are very much aware that not all congregation members are on Facebook. A video link to worship services will be sent by e-mail. In addition, copies of the sermon, bulletin, and daily devotionals will be mailed to members who do not have e-mail accounts.

Caring for Neighbors

Please continue to demonstrate love and care and pray for our neighbors during this time. Council members will each be assigned a group of members to contact, in order to touch base and see if there are any needs that can be addressed. If you would like to be available to get groceries, prescriptions, etc. for members needing to stay at home, please call the church office (314-353-2288) as we are creating a list. The office will be open each morning from 9 a.m.-12 noon. Pastor Sarah is available at the office or on her cell phone.

Please Continue to Give

Though we may not be gathering in person for some time, the ministry of the church continues, including our financial commitments. There may be some members who will be losing some income during this time, such as restaurant workers, small business owners, etc. For those who are able, please continue your financial stewardship to the church. The following ways to give are available:

- You can mail a check: Hope UCC, 6273 Eichelberger St., St. Louis, MO 63109.
- You can have your bank send a check from your account via online billing or by calling your local branch. Some members already do this, setting up automatic monthly payments.
- You can give through our website: www.hoReuccstl.org. Please note that the church pays a small fee for these transactions, so we encourage automatic giving through your bank if feasible.

Prayerful Reflection (*from Thom. M. Shuman, 2020*)

***We are the church
When we are inside a building,
And when we are outside caring for others.***

***We are the church
when we gather to pray
And when we disperse to be the answers to prayers.***

***We are the church
When we sing hymns and songs
And when we tell stories to little children.***

***We are the church
When we listen to scripture
And when we share that good news with strangers.***

***We are the church
Not because of a building, or songs,
Words, or worship,
Meetings, or polity,
But because of a Life
And when we share that Life with the world.***

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any pastoral care for you in this unsettling time, or if you have ideas for ways in which we can care for one another in perhaps new and creative ways.

Peace, prayers, and hope,
Pastor Sarah