

March 24, 2020

SSCC Leadership Council Report
Senior Minister – Rev. Dr. Nathan C. Brown

It has been quite a start to 2020 for SSCC – unlike any other I suspect the church has experienced. Between the flood and COVID-19, we have certainly faced great challenges. And yet...SSCC does not cease to amaze me in its resilience. Not only have people come together to be church despite not having plumbing in the building for a month, but also in spite of not being able to gather in person altogether. Folks continue to check in on one another, are finding new ways to be in ministry and maintain an ongoing love for our community of faith.

Since our decision to close the facility through the end of March, the staff and I have been creatively trying to think of ways to do our ministry differently. I am grateful for a staff that is taking initiative, each day, to stay in touch with one another, and their respective groups, to discover new ways to go about their respective work.

We've moved to livestreaming worship on Sunday mornings and are experimenting with incorporating different voices and components in the worship experience. We have set up a shepherding ministry among the Elders and Deacons, which will likely roll out next week, to make sure that everyone is being contacted on a regular basis through this time. Youth group is meeting virtually, on Sunday evenings, through zoom meetings. Ella and Susan are figuring out how to record music that they might share through worship or at other times throughout the week. We launched today, "SSCC Bright Spots," a weekly, uplifting e-blast to the congregation about how congregants are spending their time during the COVID-19 outbreak. We are attempting to communicate to the congregation, in shorter bursts, but on a more regular basis, to keep folks up-to-date and connected.

It's amazing how, even in the darkness, light continues to emerge in so many different ways. On a personal note, I'm being challenged, in positive ways, to utilize technology and social media in ways I never have before. These are not the circumstances under which I would ideally learn – yet, I am learning and growing every day. Not to mention, our ministry is reaching people it would never otherwise reach because of the degree to which folks are tuning in.

To date, we've had over 350 views on our first livestream worship service and over 250 views thus far on last week's livestream. If you were to assume that, on average, each view represents two people watching, you can do the math to see just how many are tuning in. To put it in perspective, our first livestream worship video is our most viewed sermon video by more than one hundred views. Our worship attendance online has been better than in-person.

While so much has been on hold since the flood in early February, some things continue to move forward in our midst. Our contract with Ministry Architects is up in less than a month, so we have been utilizing them as much as we can, on at least two fronts. First, Lesleigh Carmichael continues to chair the Day School Task Force, which has been meeting, despite the ongoing challenges we have faced these last several months. We are deep in our work on crafting a new governance for SSCC and TDS. In fact, we are close to finalizing an initial draft – we may

even do so at tomorrow night's meeting. The spirit of the work has been collaborative and everyone feels good about the progress we are making. We continue to build on and grow that relationship, even though the circumstances have been far from ideal.

Second, MA has been helping move forward a change to our church software – which has been a long time coming. They will be briefly presenting tonight on their research and findings. A great deal of work has been done on this front and I'm grateful to Owen Janeway, Cathy Cortright and Janet Gray for helping move this forward.

When the flood hit, we put personnel reviews on hold. There was enough stress on everyone at the time, that we did not want to add to it. Now with the added stress of COVID-19, we will pick these up when things calm down and we can get back to some sense of normalcy in our ministry.

At this point, given where things stand in our world, I'm going to recommend that we follow the CDC's recommendation on March 15th, to not meet in groups of 50 or more for eight weeks. This would mean that we would not worship together in person again until May 10th. However, things are constantly changing, so I suggest we make announcements in smaller dosages. I recommend we cancel all in-person gatherings at church until mid-April, at which point we will reevaluate. Unfortunately, this means that we would not gather in person for Holy Week and Easter. However, I'm already planning an Easter celebration in my mind for the first Sunday we are able to gather together in the sanctuary!

Finally, on a personal note, my mom went back into the hospital yesterday. Unfortunately, the hospitals are not allowing any visitation right now. Please keep her, and our family, in your prayers.

Thank you for ALL you are doing right now to continue the ministry of SSCC. I'm grateful for everything that each and every one of you do.

Peace,
Nathan