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Spring 2020 COVID-19 UPDATE

March 26, 2020

First Lutheran Church of Columbia Heights (FLC)

To the People of the First Lutheran Church Community,

I'm writing with another update about what's happening at First Lutheran in the midst of this pandemic and time of social distancing. God has called us to a new time as the people of God. It is unfamiliar, and often scary, and an opportunity in many ways.

We are continuing to offer worship as an online experience, or, for those without internet access, by a mailing. Thank you for the many kind comments we received about our first attempt at this! Sunday we discovered the reality of "Every Table is an Altar." We will provide another service on March 29, available online through Facebook and YouTube, and later, on our website.

We expect this will continue for Holy Week and Easter, and at least through May 15. This includes the postponement or cancellation of events like the Last Supper drama, the Palm Sunday brunch, etc. We will follow the recommendations of the Governor of Minnesota and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about when and how we gather. This is hard news to hear, I know. But the "Stay Home" recommendations are for your wellbeing, and the wellbeing of others.

Rachel James and the leaders of Sunday School and Confirmation have created packets mailed or emailed to homes, along with some online experiences. Feedback has been very positive. Our young people already know this online-learning world!

We provided curbside pickup service last Sunday for the Community Meal. We had a steady stream of people who stopped by. We did run out of food, and are prepared for more this coming Sunday (Menu: Pork roast dinner). Pastor Jill and I will again be available to visit (from six feet away!) for a bit and pray with you.

Community Care is an ongoing challenge. Many members are very isolated from their families and friends. We are working on a "bigger plan" for how to care for each other. There will be announcements soon about how you can support each other in this faith community. For now, please reach out by phone, email, or a written note to people you know.

Nathan Roberts created a closed Facebook group for our community, First Lutheran Community Group. This has quickly grown to more than 100 people. Ask to be added, if you aren't already.

The staff and leaders of our congregation are learning many new things and ways of doing what cannot not, for now, be done face-to-face. For safety, we have limited our time in the office and are working from home. The staff met on Tuesday using Zoom, an online meeting tool, and the Church Council did the same later the same day. It is a welcome way to connect at this time.

Our restrictions on gathering affect funerals and memorials. In-person contact at a funeral or memorial service cannot continue at this time. The church council has approved a policy that is similar to the one used by our local funeral home. Until the Governor of Minnesota or the CDC lift restrictions, First Lutheran will provide a graveside service limited to no more than ten people for the family of a deceased person. After the restrictions are lifted, we will host a memorial service and reception as our schedule allows.

We look forward to the day when we may gather as the people of God to give thanks for those who have died during this time commend them to God, together. The Holy Spirit is already at work to grieve with us, comfort us, and inspire us for a new time in the church, and in our country and world.

Council and boards are meeting and planning beyond this pandemic. We are talking with contractors about our parking lot & rain garden project. We are planning for worship services during Holy Week that may look a bit different but include the same sense of our community in each one. Expect to be faithful and surprised...in a good way!

Please note:

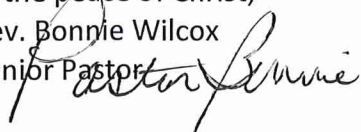
1. We have a great phone system at church. If you call and leave a message when no one is here, the staff is able to listen to messages at home.
2. Staff is able to access and respond to email as they Work From Home (WFH). This is already our practice.
3. We will use our website and Facebook page to share important information.
4. Phone calls and written notes and letters will be used to communicate with those who do not have email or internet access.

Your prayers for the staff and our leaders are deeply appreciated. The last page of this mailing includes the work of our Council this week to support our staff.

As I wrote last week, "no one has ever done this before." We miss the personal contact. We aren't always good at the new things we try. (This is what every parent who is teaching their child/children at home at this time knows.) Your grace, patience and forgiveness are deeply appreciated.

We are still the people of God called to Live Connected...to God and Each Other. We need to keep doing that work, as the Spirit calls and guides us. Be safe, and be well.

In the peace of Christ,
Rev. Bonnie Wilcox
Senior Pastor



Enclosures:

- **How You Can Help**, dated 03/26/2020
- **Statement to the FLC Staff**, dated 03/24/2020 (from the Church Council & Finance Committee)

How You Can Help:

Updated: March 26, 2020



- A. **Do you have email?** Does the church have the email address you most frequently use? If not, please send it to info@flcch.org so that we can continue to be connected.
- B. **Do we have the most accurate phone number to reach you?** If not, please call the church to give us updated information, or send an email to info@flcch.org?
- C. **Do we have an accurate postal address for you?** Again, please call or email the church.
- D. We would like households to help us **create content for online worship**: Do you like to write prayers, or would be willing to create Story Time with your children at home to share with the community? Or might you record you or a family member playing a song/hymn of faith? Saying the Lord's Prayer?
- E. **Phone trees** to say, "How are you doing?" will be created. Could you make phone calls to 5-7 people (or more) each week?
- H. **Note Card Ministry**: Could you make and/or write cards at home to other members of the church? To people separated from their families? Are you able to donate blood?
- F. **Meal Support programs**. Thank you to everyone has offered to help with the Community Meal and After School food programs. For the safety of each other, and the vulnerable people we encounter, we will limit how many may be involved.
- G. **Electronic Giving**: Our ministry will not stop during this time. Your gifts to sustain the work we do to love our neighbors is as important as ever. Mailing your offering, or using electronic giving, is deeply, deeply appreciated. THANK YOU for the faithful people who have continued their support.
- I. **Share your Ideas!** We expect to hold a Holy Humor service after Easter, to laugh at Jesus' victory over death and the devil. A member suggested a delightful skit we can do for a good belly laugh!
- J. **The Word of the Lord**: "When you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you." Jeremiah 29:12

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Find us on Facebook

Date: 2020-03-24

To the dedicated staff members of First Lutheran Church of Columbia Heights

The Church Council and the Board of Finance are committed to finding means to honor your compensation during these difficult times and to keep your pay as consistent as possible.

At this time, we are able to assure you that your compensation will continue uninterrupted through May 31, 2020. At that time, we will need to reevaluate our situation based on the latest public health conditions and the financial situation of our congregation.

Please continue to take precautions for yourself and for those around you:

- Work remotely whenever possible. Staff should only be physically present at church when their physical presence is necessary in order to continue the missions and ministries deemed essential by the Church Council.
- Limit the number of individuals physically present in our church facility to no more than ten and maintain social distancing between those individuals.
- Protect our staff and church community by washing your hands regularly, taking care of yourselves, and staying home if you are sick.
- Encourage older adult members of our church community and/or those members with high-risk health concerns to refrain from participating in the missions and ministries of our congregation unless their participation can be done remotely.

Our continued gratitude and appreciation to our valued church staff for working to support and continue the mission and ministry of our congregation during these unprecedented events.