

St. John Lutheran Church  
13 East Main Street  
Fairfield, Pa 17320

## **Worship Cancellation and COVID-19**

*“For God will keep us safe, sheltering us in time of trouble:  
God will secret us under the cover of his tent,  
and raise us beyond reach of distress.” (Psalm 27:5)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

You have been on my heart and in my thoughts these days. It has been two Sundays and yet it feels like it has already been months. Concern about the coronavirus escalates and intensifies by the day. Late Friday afternoon I received word that the Lower Susquehanna Synod recommended suspending worship in person until today, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. They have now extended this recommendation to March 31<sup>st</sup>. **Out of love for our community and neighbors, sadly, in-person worship services cannot occur.**

Our presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and our Bishop James Dunlop, have shared what seems to be a consensus among ELCA bishops that our congregations need to follow the directives of local government and health officials. We must prepare ourselves for the strong possibility that **in-person face-to-face gatherings for worship will be canceled for the foreseeable future.** Executive orders of both Governors and the White House have declared that public gatherings must be limited to less than 10 people. We must prepare ourselves for the realization that congregational in-person celebrations of Holy Week and Easter may not occur this year at St. John. Our neighboring ELCA bishop in Delaware-Maryland synod writes that, whether or not we are able to meet in our buildings, *“We are church even when we don’t gather in church buildings.”*

On these past two Sundays even though we could not physically share worship, Pastor Joseph and I have prayed and celebrated. We remembered each of you in prayer and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. Together, we read and reflected on the Gospel in our home. We are considering ways to share some of our thoughts with you via the internet.

Please bear with me as I learn to navigate new modes of communication. I highly recommend partaking in online worship on Sunday’s at 10 a.m. and Wednesdays at 7 p. m. through the Delaware-Maryland Synod:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS7Ybv7zZqMFsYe3Vt5t0Lg>.

You can also access worship on Facebook or YouTube by searching DE-MD synod ELCA.

We are in unprecedented times and with God’s help, we will find our way through this together. Please communicate with one another—start calling—texting—checking-in, and supporting one another. This naturally happens at St. John, so it is not a surprise to me—you have always looked out for one another, as well as, your neighbor. This is more important now than ever.

I have been in conversation with our Parish Secretary, Karen Moriarty. In the interest of safety, Karen will work mainly from home. She and I are able to retrieve phone messages. We will try to keep you posted through email communication, Facebook, and the St. John’s website. Mail will be picked up regularly.

**We are establishing open office call-in hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p. m.** During those hours, folks may feel free to call and express worries or any concerns. Of course, without question you are free to call whenever there's an emergency. Our home phone number is **717-338-1215**.

Our council president, Sue Hull and I have spoken about having meetings with council members via conference call, or perhaps through the internet during this time of mandated social distancing.

Several of you have asked about weekly offerings—thank you. Please remember that the needs of the church continue. Consistency in giving is important, especially in small congregations. As you are able, and in your generosity—please support the church and those ministries that serve our neighbors in need. Congregational payroll, utilities bills and other expenses continue despite COVID-19.

Many people do banking online these days. We are looking into arrangements with Adams County Bank for direct deposit and contributions. As soon as we have information regarding this, we will share that with you. In the meantime please contribute as you always have—contributions may be mailed to St. John at 13 East Main Street Fairfield, Pa 17320.

In closing, this situation is perhaps among the most difficult many of us have ever faced. It is not easy when you've been accustomed to active busy schedules. Several days ago Father Richard Rohr wrote that he was urged by his community to self-quarantine for his own protection. He writes: *"I've had years of practice, literally, on how to do what we are calling social distancing."* Fr. Rohr reminds us that we are in the midst of a teachable moment and that there's no doubt that this is a time we will refer to for the rest of our lives. I am not the most disciplined in practicing silence and meditation, but I do know that there is great comfort in practicing mindfulness and prayer. And—while it is important for each of us stay informed, Pastor Joey often urges me to turn off the news—at least, for a while. Don't tell him, but it's good advice.

Be mindful of how you are feeling—whatever you're feeling—and use this time to enter more fully into God's presence. In the words of Henri Nouwen: *"Hope frees us to live in the present, with deep trust that God will never leave us."*

Take comfort in knowing that you are held in God's great love!

You have my love and prayers always,

*Pastor Bev*

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