

Dear friends,

One reason I love Baldwin First UMC so deeply is because our community is always mindful of the impact our actions have on the community around us. The work of our church is strongest when we hold ourselves accountable to this practice, because we recognize that our work is much larger than ourselves.

The rapid spread of coronavirus COVID-19 is a public health crisis that has the potential to overwhelm our healthcare system and community resources, which can disproportionately affect those who are most vulnerable. Though few cases of COVID-19 have been identified in the area at this time, we know that the virus spreads through person-to-person contact that is facilitated through large public gatherings, and that the best way to combat the spread of the virus is to engage in social distancing.

The health and safety of those who are the most vulnerable in our community is our highest priority during this time. After prayerful consideration, consultation with healthcare professionals in our church, and in alignment with guidance from the Center for Disease Control and the Douglas County Health Department, **I have decided to temporarily suspend all in-person gatherings for the foreseeable future.**

Here is the good news—I am confident this will not impair our ability to be good news to our community. I am excited about the possibility of

pursuing new and innovative solutions to engage with one another and our community while also taking action that we believe is in the best interest of public health. I am also confident that you all, as followers of Christ, will be seeking every opportunity to share the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ, even if from a greater distance than usual.

Beginning immediately, we will move our in-person programming online.

Sunday Worship Experiences

We will continue our practice of streaming Scripture and a sermon on Sunday morning live on our Facebook page. These will be posted to YouTube early in the week. We will also expand this streaming to include announcements and a time of prayer together. We do not have the necessary licensing to stream music yet, but links will be provided to music that may enhance your worship experience. The format of these services will be different than our usual live stream, but the experience will be very familiar for those who have worshipped with us before.

I ask you to commit to tuning in to our worship experiences live at 10:45 a.m. on Sunday with your loved ones, if possible. We will have moderators joining in together to have conversation and take prayer requests while the service is happening. Even if we cannot be together in-person, we still can share the worship experience with one another.

If you don't have access to reliable internet, or if you are concerned about your ability to participate in this offering in any way, please reach out to me directly and our care team will make every effort to provide an accommodation.

Weekday Programming

Our life together isn't limited to our Sunday worship experiences and, to that end, **we're working to provide access for virtual gatherings on Zoom.** Keep your eyes open for more information soon about how that will work, and, as before, contact me directly if you need help connecting in these ways.

You can also expect an email from me every Monday morning with more information about the online programs we have planned for that week.

Circle of Care Groups

Sign up [here](#) to become part of a circle of care group. These will be groups of 6-8 households who commit to stay in contact with one another in the coming weeks. These groups may provide a social check in, a break from loneliness, prayers, and help maintain our connection to one another.

Community Partners

Our **community partners** such as the food bank and various recovery and support groups are critical to the well-being of our neighbors, and in this time of uncertainty, their work is as important as ever, and we will continue to support their work during this uncertain time. The Food Pantry leadership will be making modifications to their procedures to protect their patrons and volunteers alike, and those will be shared as they are set. Likewise, I am reaching out to our 12 step groups to encourage them to find ways for people to engage from a distance, but our doors will continue to be open to them if they choose to continue meeting. We will make sure that supplies are available for them to take steps to mitigate infection risks.

We will continue to work with the Community Emergency Fund to provide assistance to community members who have a loss of income or other dire financial needs during this time. If you or someone you know needs help, please reach out to me directly at [316-207-3740](tel:316-207-3740). If you or your neighbors, coworkers, or friends are able to provide funds to make sure our friends are healthy and cared for, please also reach out directly.

Pastoral Care and Connection

Connecting with and caring for one another is, always, one of our community's highest priorities. Over these coming weeks, please reach out to each other via text, phone, email or social media. Our congregational care team is ready to connect with you as well. If there's anything at all that you or your loved ones need during this time, please reach out to me directly by email at Pastorabaker@gmail.com and a member of our congregational care team will reach out to you to set up a video chat, FaceTime, or phone call.

We are making these temporary adjustments to how we conduct life together at Baldwin First United Methodist Church out of an abundance of caution and because we believe this is the responsible choice in the interest of public health. Please be assured that, as soon as it is safe for us to do so, we will be ecstatic to return to our in-person gatherings with one another.

Giving

As it has been since December, you can continue to support the work of our church by giving online at our website www.baldwinfirst.org, or by texting the amount you would like to give to 855.905.1967, or find us on the GivePLUS app on the App Store or Google Play.

One last thing. I want to leave you with words from Paul's letter to the Philippians. *"Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus."* These efforts we are making now are not made out of fear or anxiety. They are made with the full peace of God that guides our leadership and our community. Though we may be physically distant, we are connected to one another through God's power, the gifts of technology, and our care for each other that surpasses any limitations.

Our mission remains the same: to love and serve God and neighbor as disciples of Jesus Christ. I'm looking forward to seeing you all in person and greeting you with a big hug very soon—but until then, take care of yourselves, take care of one another, and take care of those who are on the margins.

I'll see you online!

With love,

Rev. Amanda Baker

Baldwin First United Methodist Church