

Friday, March 13, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ,

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment” (2 Timothy 1:7).

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has caused widespread concern. This pandemic—as well as the ongoing influenza season—is a source of concern for many of our members, especially those who are older or who have compromised immune systems. You have no doubt heard that many colleges, businesses, sports leagues, schools, and churches are choosing to cancel events to try to cut down on the exponential spread of the disease.

This evening, the session of the church decided that we should be proactive and prudent. We have decided to suspend all non-worship activities at the church from March 14-28, and that on March 15 and 22, our worship services will be available via [LiveStream](#) and on Titan Radio (88.9 FM). I ask that only worship leaders be in the building on those Sundays in order to provide a worship experience in which everyone else is encouraged to participate from the safety and comfort of your own home.

Sunday school classes and other gatherings or activities are canceled. Committees may receive instructions in the coming days (or may decide for themselves) about how they might choose to meet electronically in order to ensure that the church’s decision-making and planning activities continue. We are encouraging outside groups that use the building to take suitable precautions.

We did not come to this decision easily, but we want to err on the side of caution. While it is indeed the case that COVID-19 is not fatal to the vast majority of people who contract the virus, those who do become dangerously ill are those who are 70 years of age or older, or who have other pre-existing conditions, or who are immune compromised. It is for their sake that we take these precautions.

As for the offering, we will try to push instructions to you about how you can give your tithes, pledges, and offerings electronically. Barring that, you are invited to make your offering by sending a check in the mail. It is important that, even though we are not physically meeting in the same space, our levels of financial support remain steady. Among other things, this will help to ensure that we maintain our mission commitments, and that we are able to respond to community needs, should they arise.

The office staff will continue to come and go at the church as they have need, but the building itself will not need to be open to the public during this time, and so will remain locked.

As my pastoral colleague, the Rev. Dr. Jordan Rimmer, recently wrote to our neighbors in the Northminster Presbyterian Church, “Don’t be motivated or overwhelmed by fear. As Christians, we are not people of fear but people of FAITH. We do not want to work out of fear or panic. So be cautious, be wise, but do not let fear rule in your heart.”

Loving our neighbors not only means inconveniencing ourselves in order to ensure their health and safety, but also being proactive to aiding those being affected by this unusual set of circumstances. I hope that we will see this as an opportunity to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community. There are some who may lose income because their places of employment are closed—how might we assist them? There are almost certainly families in our school district who depend upon the school system to provide two meals a day to their children—who will ensure that they are fed now? The residents at Shenango on the Green are not permitted to receive visitors for the next few weeks—how might we reach out to them with a phone call or a card, to let them know that we continue to think of them even as they are cordoned off?

Finally, we are called to care for one another in the church. If you have a basic need (toiletries, food, medication, etc.) and you cannot get out or are uncomfortable leaving the house, please let us know if we can help. You can leave a message at the church (724-946-3541) or email me at revcamlin@gmail.com. Please understand that the office may not be occupied as much as normal, so you will likely need to leave a message if you call (so emailing me might be the more expedient option).

We will continue to monitor developments and respond as we gain new wisdom. In the meantime, let us be praying for one another, for our government leaders, and especially for our health care professionals.

Yours in Christ’s Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Matthew L. Camlin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Matthew L. Camlin, Pastor