

A letter for my congregation:

Beloved in the Lord,

COVID-19 is in our midst and it is making an impact on every part of our lives, both individually and communally. Every day brings more news and not much of it seems to be good. This illness is causing tremendous hardships and there are more on the way.

It is also a time when the church will be needed more than ever. There is much work for us to do; the well-being of the members of St. Thomas and the community at large are at stake.

At times I have felt overwhelmed by all the implications of this pandemic, but we do not have the luxury of either despair or panic. The work God has placed before us demands our very best. God's work, our hands, indeed.

One of the marks of the church is the way that it cares for the most vulnerable in their midst, something that St. Thomas is already so very good at. This will require that we stay in close contact with each other so that we can help provide for everyone's needs.

It is clear that social distancing is one of the essential elements in order to slow the spread of this virus. Many church and civic leaders are strongly urging congregations to cancel public worship services and other gatherings. This presents yet another challenge. How can we be the church when we cannot gather?

We have decided that we will have worship services this Sunday. After worship, the church council will meet and discuss best practices moving forward. We will also try to formulate ways that we can still worship "together" virtually.

We are taking many precautions to make our gathering on Sunday safe, but I want you to take care of yourselves first and foremost. If you have any symptoms or are at higher risk, please stay at home. If you are not comfortable or choose to avoid the risk of coming to church, please know that we most certainly understand.

Fred Rogers shared something that his mother said at times like these: look for the helpers. We will be the helpers during this crisis. We may also become those who need the help. We are exploring more ways that we can facilitate effective and timely communication so that all are cared for. We know that God has promised not only to be with us in and through all that we will face, but to bless us along the way, so we will move forward together with good courage and love.

Finally, there is still much beauty in the world. This virus cannot stop that. As Paul wrote to the church in Philippi,

*whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.*

Peace be with you all,

Pastor Darby

13 March 2020