

3-29-20 Austin's Update

With the news constantly changing about the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, we wanted to keep you updated at church. For me, personally, this week has felt the most significant in the era of social distancing, as it's our first week after spring break without school. The ongoing reality of our current situation is beginning to sink in for me, as I'm sure it is for many of you, too.

This week our session has unanimously voted to continue all of our worship services online instead of person through Monday, April 13th. This includes all Holy Week services. We will have Palm Sunday at 10am on April 5th, Maundy Thursday at 6pm on April 9th, Good Friday at 6pm on April 10th, and Easter Sunday at 10am on April 12th. These will all be online on our YouTube and Facebook pages, which you search for on those platforms or find links to them on our church website – www.fpcfd.org.

We are working to adapt each of these services so they remain true to the theological themes they celebrate, while allowing for healthy social distancing practices. We are working to create multisensory experiences as much as possible for each service. We are still planning to have Communion on April 5th, as we would on the first Sunday of any month, and on Maundy Thursday. We've still got our Palms ordered!

Regarding our other regularly scheduled events, gatherings, and meetings, **we have cancelled, postponed, or taken online all other events within our church until at least April 13th.** We will continue to update you about any further changes as we learn more from our state and local leadership.

I have been amazed at the hard work our staff has continued to exhibit in these uncertain times. Throughout this past week, we've still been able to keep KidZone open and conduct many of our meetings online, conduct ongoing administration for our church, invite countless community members to embrace new mission opportunities, plan worship services, and offer over 3.5 hours of online video content.

As many of you are experiencing, there is a steep learning curve to online work. Technology does not always work as planned. New tools are researched, purchased, learned, and utilized. Workspaces need to be set up and changed as needed. Each of our staff has put in countless hours behind the scenes in order to create what we have pushed online. We will continue to do so in the future.

In case you haven't heard, I'd like to highlight what we're currently producing online. As stated above, all of our worship services are online live at the times listed. Additionally, every morning at 11am on Facebook and 11:30am on Instagram, I'm offering a 5-minute reflection about our upcoming sermon passage. I welcome comments, questions, and observations on those social media channels each day. Every Wednesday, Rebecca offers a roughly 30-minute question and answer time about any questions families might have. These can be questions about faith, current events, or anything else fun you'd like to see her address. Just email her a question ahead of time at rdix@pts.edu and she'll prepare an answer for you. Lastly, each Thursday evening at 6pm,

Gabriel and Mary are offering a live stream of church songs and hymns with some commentary in between. This roughly 45-minute time is also open to comments all throughout. If you have a favorite, send them an email or a message on Facebook – gabriel@firstpresfd.org or marya@firstpresfd.org.

If you're looking for some more connection, we are creating Marco Polo groups. This is a cell phone video text messaging app for small groups. It's a great way to stay in contact with people and support one another. If you have an Android or Apple smart phone, you can download the app for free in your app store. We currently have a few groups going. Once we get a little more of the kinks worked out, we'll be able to tell you how to join groups and invite others.

Meanwhile, we're also connecting offline. Sara has been working with our elders and deacons to personally call or reach out to each family in our church. We want to check in with you during this unprecedented time. She has also coordinated the mask sewing project for our community which has had a tremendous level of engagement so far.

And finally, we want to know if there's anything you need, or if you are aware of the needs of others in our community. We have people who've donated financially so that we can support people in crisis. Please contact our office at 515-576-2091 or email Abee at abigaila@firstpresfd.org. We want to make sure that nobody falls through the cracks.

During this season, we are seeing firsthand that the church is more than a building. The church is made up of each one of us. God is at work through us and all around us. While there is incredible uncertainty, we can be certain of God's love and steadfast mercy. I am thankful to God for the ministry of our church and for the dedicated leadership and generosity of those who've gone before us. Through their work and your ongoing work, we are empowered to continue serving God and serving others, even when everything looks unfamiliar.

I leave you with the words of the Apostle, Paul: "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up."

You all help me to not grow weary.

Blessings,
Austin D. Hill
Lead Pastor