

3-17-20 Austin's Update

The world has changed for us this past week.

We all feel the impact of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. At the time of this writing, we just received word from our Governor that all restaurants, bars, gyms, and theaters will be closed, and our school district closed schools through April 12, Easter Sunday.

This is unprecedented. There's no other way to describe it. We all are discerning together what faithfulness looks like in these times. Here is our response:

Effective today, March 17th through Tuesday, March 31st:

- All programs and activities in FPCFD are cancelled
- All outside events hosted within FPCFD are cancelled
- A Sunday morning worship service will be broadcast online at 10am
 - Instructions for how to tune in will be available on our website, Facebook page, and E-News on Wednesday, March 18
 - In creating a broadcast church service, we maintained several priorities:
 - We want to keep the services as participatory as possible. Therefore:
 - We are including responsive liturgies
 - We will post the order of service on our website and in our printed newsletter
 - Even though the service will be viewable after 10am, we encourage as many people as possible to join with us right at 10am, that we can worship God together.
 - We want to make sure that we have a secure, fast, reliable internet connection for our service broadcast so we will not be filming from our sanctuary
 - We want to make the services as accessible as possible. So the broadcasting service we'll select will be the most accessible, even if it does not have the most features
 - KidZone Day Care will remain open, but we are encouraging families to stay home
 - Our KidZone staff is currently working to provide safe and sanitary check in/out processes and is providing measures to keep kids as spread out as possible.
- Our church office will remain open, but will have limited staff availability in the office.
- Our regularly scheduled caregivers will not participate in visitation
 - For acute pastoral care needs, please contact the office at 515-576-2091 or any of our three pastors directly – Austin: 925-788-2245, Sara: 484-354-8446, Rebecca: 319-215-7900

We are prepared to keep events in April canceled if needed, but we will make the decision when we get closer to the date. Each week on Tuesday morning, our staff is meeting to evaluate whether events should resume or remain cancelled, with the understanding that the situation might need to be changed at other times as well.

In this time of social distancing, we are looking into creating more online opportunities for community, fellowship, study and service. We are excited to find new ways to bring our studies and time together to you. We'll let you know as soon as we get those things up and running. You can also go to our church website at www.fpcfd.org and click on our giving tab to set up an online giving account in less than 5 minutes.

While our church may not be open in the ways we are used to, God is still present and at work through God's people. We know that our social distancing and quarantine measures are already having a significant financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual impact. To that end, our church sees one of its primary responsibilities in this time as one of offering tangible hope, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. We have money set aside from our Deacons' fund and other members to provide for one another in real, tangible ways. If there is *anything* you need – toilet paper, groceries, help with a computer or TV, medicine – we want to help you during this time. Please contact our office or one of our pastors. Similarly, if you know of another person or family in need, please let us know.

I recognize there is fear and chaos all around – people filling shopping carts with food that will go bad before its eaten or stored, a variety of emotions being processed online, etc... Our church response was not made in haste or panic. Our session unanimously approved it, our staff has worked to implement it, and we have been in constant consultation with our Presbytery leadership and other pastors.

In closing, here's some unsolicited advice:

- Spend time with those you love, whether in person or digitally – go ahead, pick up your phone
- Give yourself grace if you are stuck at home with family who sometimes annoy you
- Try a new prayer practice during this slower pace of life – look for God at work in new places
- Don't forget: There is nothing in all of creation, not even the novel coronavirus that can separate us from God's love, in Christ Jesus – Romans 8:38
- Don't buy too much toilet paper! If you run out, we've got you covered. 😊

Blessings,
Austin D. Hill