

March 18, 2020

Dear Members of St. John's Windish,

These are unprecedented times and we are all trying to keep everyone healthy during the corona virus, COVID-19 pandemic. There are so many unknowns and things seem to change hourly. These are challenging times for everyone. There are also many opportunities for us to continue to be the church in the world. The pandemic is forcing us to think in new and creative ways to be God's hands and feet in the world and we are using this time to expand our ministries, recognizing that ministry is not based on buildings or specific locations but rather the body of Christ and this can take many forms.

The Congregational Council met on March 16th to develop a plan of action in coordination with our sisters and brothers in the United Proclamation of the Gospel (UPG). Here is what you need to know:

- Based on the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Pennsylvania Department of Health we are temporarily closing our building for all activities immediately. This includes worship services, meetings, and all other events. The building will be closed until it is deemed to be safe to gather in groups again.
- We invite everyone to join us on Facebook on Sunday mornings at 10 am for a live stream worship service in conjunction with the UPG. Pastor Jerry and Pastor Suzanne will be leading worship. After the live stream, the video will be available for your reviewing at any time. Please invite your friends and relatives regardless of where they live to join us. There will be links on both the **United Proclamation of the Gospel Facebook** page and the **St. John's Windish Facebook** page. The names listed above are the actual names of the two Facebook pages. Please like these pages and you will get ongoing information.
- In addition to the live stream worship we will be posting three reflections a week to help you to continue your Lenten journey. These will be written by Pastor Jerry and Pastor Suzanne. In addition, please check the UPG website (www.upgbethlehem.org) for the Lenten blog to continue our discussions virtually. Also, remember that Carol Henn provides daily devotions on our Facebook page.
- We will be updating our own St. John's Windish webpage (www.stjohnswindish.org) as information becomes available. Social media is quickly becoming the most effective means of communication. We will also send emails, please make sure the office has your email address.
- We will also establish times of common prayer. At noon each day we will ask you to take time to pray a common prayer. These will be posted on Facebook and our website. We can't be physically present, but we can be together spiritually.
- We encourage you to check in with each other on a regular basis. If someone has a need that you cannot meet, please reach out to the church office or Pastor Suzanne. There will not be specific office hours at this time, but Pastor Suzanne will be available via phone, text, and email.
- The Congregational Council is determined to continue to pay salaries and other expenses during the pandemic. Please know that your regular offering is even more critical during this time. We are working to get online giving up and on our website through Vanco. In the interim, please mail your offerings into the church office. For those who are able, please consider an extra offering or gift to our church.
- We will continue to update you as new information becomes available. We appreciate your assistance and your willingness to work together as we navigate this uncharted territory.

I would like to leave you with a quote from Martin Luther as he was dealing with The Black Death Plague. He wrote these wise words which can help inform the way we approach things happening in our world right now:

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor totally foolhardy and does not tempt God.”

Luther’s Works Volume 43 page 132, the letter “Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague” written to the Rev. Dr. John Hess

I keep you in my thoughts and prayers and I am confident that God is still in control. While we cannot meet face to face, I am only a phone call, text or email away. May God bless us with peace, comfort, and health in this unprecedented time. Join me also in praying for all our first responders and health care professionals that are trying to assist us day in and day out.

In Peace,

Pastor Suzanne