

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord,
'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'*

ATTENTION: St. Matthew's will not be gathering for in-person worship services on Sundays for the next few weeks. Please read this letter for the most up to date information.

March 11, 2020

Beloved Community,

Yesterday, I shared a heart-felt phone conversation with one of our members about the ever-evolving tidal wave that is COVID-19. We marveled at how rapidly recommendations from the CDC and Public Health have shifted to further restrict human contact in efforts to protect our most vulnerable neighbors. We discussed the countless meetings, trips and fundraisers that have been postponed or canceled in the last few days. At one point in the conversation our sister in Christ offered this wisdom. *"It has only been 10 days but staying mostly at home is hard. I miss my friends and church community. I guess you do not realize how much you appreciate others, until you cannot see them on a regular basis. I cannot wait until I can start hugging people again."*

It does feel as if we are in a wilderness time. It is still Lent. We are wandering in an unfamiliar landscape and all of our regular patterns and plans have been disrupted. Many people are feeling isolated, scared, worried, or disjointed as we try to make decisions. How are you doing? **Please know, you are loved and not alone. God promises to be a refuge for your worry and a fortress for your resolve. The wilderness forces us to let go of our false notions of control and trust in the full, unwavering presence of God. God is with you.**

Over the course of the last 10 days, I have sent out two letters to the St. Matthew's community about COVID-19 via facebook and a special email. (You can find them on the St. Matthew's website www.smlc.cc) Each letter outlined how we as a community were enhancing our cleaning practices, implementing proper food handling protocols, making changes to worship, and postponing midweek Lenten services. However, the information in the letters was out of date in less than 24 hours. Even today, my initial letter was ready to print at 1pm and by 3pm it was out of date and whole sections needed to be revised. Whew! It has become very clear that we cannot rely on a monthly newsletter to provide all of the relevant information about developments within our community in a timely manner. We need to be much more nimble and responsive and use email and social media.

If you are not currently receiving emails from St. Matthew's, I highly encourage you to call Libby at the church office 425.226.2420 or email stmatthewschurch@comcast.net to begin receiving messages. We are now sending updates 2-3 times a week to keep the community up to date. If you are unable to receive emails, please let us know and we can put you on a phone tree.

On Monday evening, the St. Matthew's church Council met via ZOOM (video conference) to develop a health plan for the community and affirm the steps we have already taken to keep people safe, in compliance with Public Health recommendations. I am very grateful for their exceptional leadership. At the end of our meeting, we prayed for all those who have been exposed, infected, or impacted by this virus. We also prayed for each of you as you navigate the complexity of the uncharted times. As a community we are dedicated to caring for one another and our broader community, even if we cannot gather as we are accustomed for this season. The Spirit is empowering us to be creative and resourceful!

Here is the most up-to-date information.

WORSHIP

This afternoon King County banned any gatherings of 250 or more people. If organizations do offer gatherings of any size they must screen every person in attendance for the coronavirus. On a call today, Bishop Shelley Wee of the Northwest Washington Synod, encouraged faith leaders in King County to consider suspending in-person worship services. Experts tell us that the coronavirus is 10 times more contagious than the common flu and is spread through human to human contact. Following the way of Jesus, who cared for the marginalized and the sick, it is important for us as a community to be in solidarity with all those who are at risk of getting COVID-19. **St. Matthew's will be suspending our weekly Sunday worship services for the next few weeks.** This is the most grace-filled and compassionate choice for us to make at this time, so that all of our members remain safe.

THERE WILL BE THREE WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED IN WORSHIP.

- 1) ON-LINE LIVE STREAMED WORSHIP EXPERIENCE at 10 am on Sunday. You can access this by joining the St. Matthew's Facebook group page. St. Matthew's Renton, WA. If you would like to learn how to get onto Facebook and watch online, please call the church office. 425.226.2420.
- 2) WORSHIP VIDEO will be sent via email every Sunday afternoon, a short worship video will be sent out via email to all those who are unable to attend the live Facebook worship event. You can watch the video from your phone or computer.
- 3) If you are unable to watch either of the videos and would like to receive a printout of the worship service with scriptures and prayers, please contact Libby in the church office and she will mail you a copy on the following Monday.

COMMUNITY CARE

A quick reminder, if you are ill, please remain at home and take good care of yourself. Contact your health care provider if you are running a fever or have trouble breathing. If you are over the age of 60, have underlying health concerns, or have been exposed to the coronavirus, please practice social distancing. The prevailing wisdom is that limiting human contact or "nonessential gatherings" is one of the best ways for communities to decrease the spread of the virus and protect family, friends and neighbors.

We have a **spiritual care team** and an **outreach team** in place to provide for the St. Matthew's community. If you are in need of groceries, medication, or other errands, and are not able to leave your home, please let us know. If you would like prayer or a meaningful conversation, please call! You can call the church office, 425.226.2420. In case of emergencies, please call Pastor Kacey's cell 651.587.4219.

If you are diagnosed with the coronavirus, please call the church office and let us know. We would like to provide pastoral care, and if necessary, communicate with the broader community and activate our health plan for the church.

LENTEN EVENTS and CLASSES

The mid-week Wednesday Lenten lunch and study is postponed until we can ensure that our vulnerable members can gather safely. The mid-week Lenten Wednesday dinner/worship and GODSPELL are also postponed.

HEALTH PLAN (created by the St. Matthew's Council on March 9, 2020)
(Please note we are already in Phase #4)

PHASE #1 | Encourage good hygiene, change cleaning policies, enhance food handling procedures. Encourage all people who are sick to remain at home.

PHASE #2 | Encourage social distancing, no longer offer fellowship or gatherings with food, postpone faith formation, Sunday School and Lenten worship.

PHASE #3 | Encourage all teams and nonessential gatherings to use ZOOM. Encourage all members who are over 60, have underlying health issues or are pregnant to remain home. Offer a worship service with no human contact and offer on-line options for the community.

PHASE #4 | In the event that the Renton School District closes and/or faith communities are asked not to gather in any way, we will move all worship services on-line or via video. The building will remain open to the public, however, hours are subject to change. Staff will work remotely or in the building.

PHASE #5 | If there is a known case of COVID-19 within the St. Matthew's community, the building will be closed immediately and cleaned by professionals. Working with public health, St. Matthew's leadership will follow guidelines for communicating with the broader community and mobilize a proper quarantine. St. Matthew's building will be closed, and worship will be on-line.

Thank you for your flexibility and understanding. Know that as a community, we are doing our best to provide safety and good counsel.

SERVICE and NEW OPPORTUNITIES

St. Matthew's will still be hosting the Arise Program in April. We are working closely with Catholic Communities Services and the City of Renton to provide hospitality and care. More information will be sent to you at a later date.

Discussions are also taking place to offer food or resources to our most vulnerable neighbors in the community. If you would like to help with creative solutions, please contact Libby in the church office. 425.226.2420.

Sending you all my love and prayers. Thankfully, we know that being church is not restricted to one hour on a Sunday morning in a sanctuary. God promises to be with us always and give us the gift of peace even in the midst of unknowns. The psalmist reminds us that God is our shelter and our refuge. Thanks be to God and peace be with you!

In God's loving care,

Pastor Kacey Hahn (and St. Matthew's staff - Libby, Derek, TJ, Cameron, Dave)