

Good morning St. Matthew's Council, Staff and Leaders,

Peace be with you.

This week there has been a flurry of evolving recommendations from Public Health and the CDC for faith communities in light of COVID-19. Here in Renton, the Senior Center, Community Center and the libraries have closed or greatly restricted public gatherings. Renton city employees are being asked to conduct all of their meetings virtually. In addition, University of Washington, Bellevue College and Seattle University have moved all of their classes to on-line. 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 our most vulnerable citizens.

Last Sunday at worship and at our first Wednesday Lenten meal/worship we were able to quickly respond to hygiene and safety practices. Thank you for your flexibility as leaders! Over the course of the last 48 hours, new guidelines instruct organizations to limit group gatherings of 50 or more (other sources recommend 10 or more). There are churches in the area that have opted to conduct their services online and not have in-person gatherings. In an informal poll on Facebook with local, Lutheran leaders, 6 churches have decided to meet on-line and 24 have opted to gather, but are drastically shifting elements in worship.

The most current recommendations to lessen exposure to the virus are here. <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/news/2020/March/5-slowing-the-impact.aspx>

Bishop Shelley Wee sent out this letter to pastor's yesterday: <https://www.lutheransnw.org/covid-19>

Although the **risk of infection remains low for a vast cross-section of the public**, as a community gathering space, we are committed to doing everything we can to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the community. Pastor Darla of Community of Hope in Columbia

One of the hallmarks of Jesus' life and ministry was the way he placed **the well-being of the most marginalized and vulnerable people at the center of the community**. Given this example, as we consider how to respond to the coronavirus outbreak in our midst, we are giving the highest consideration to those who are at highest risk from the virus.

As a community, this is how we will be proceeding:

- 1) Today, I am calling 30 of our most vulnerable members to see how they are doing and touching base about their health. I will also be letting them know that we are on standby for future church gatherings.
- 2) We will gather for worship tomorrow (March 8, 2020), however, we will not be sharing the peace, passing the offering plate, or distributing communion. Everyone will be instructed to take their bulletin home with them.
- 3) The Courageous Conversation after worship has been postponed to a later date.
- 4) The mid-week Wednesday Lenten lunch and study is postponed until we can ensure that our vul-

nerable members can gather safely.

5) Our mid-week Lenten Wednesday dinner/worship and Godspell are postponed to a later date.

6) Tomorrow the 10am worship services will be live streamed on FaceBook for those who cannot be in attendance. A constant contact will go out with a video, devotional and prayer too.

7) Adult Faith Formation 9:15-9:50 will be postponed tomorrow and the Spiritual Care Training Session will be postponed to a later date. (I have calls out to Sunday School teachers to see about tomorrow.)

8) The Council will be meeting on Monday night via ZOOM. The Council will decide the protocols we will take if worship next Sunday needs to be moved on-line and we cancel an in-person gathering.

We did not send out a March newsletter, as most of our events are in flux. At this point, we might be sending out a weekly letter to remain flexible and current.

Staff and leaders, at this point it is up to your discretion to move forward with your scheduled events. If you would like to use the ZOOM platform for any meetings (Stewardship, Justice and Mercy, etc) please let me know and I can set up a scheduled meeting. We now have a plan that can host up to 100 people on a call at a time. If you decide to cancel a meeting or gathering, please let us know in the church office so that we can be up-to-date.

For now the church office will remain open on Monday and the AfterSchool program will be continue with Tuesday/Thursday and Friday gatherings. In talking with Terri, she will be following the Renton School District and be in close conversation with her volunteers. One option might be canceling the AfterSchool program on Tuesdays and Thursdays and continue to offer a breakfast for students, if school is in session. Terri will keep us updated. Thank you Terri.

I will be sending another letter out to the congregation later today, but I wanted to give all of you an update.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions, suggestions or concerns.

In God's Peace, KC