

March 25, 2020

Weekly Update

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

First of all, I want you all to know that our hearts and prayers go out to each of you and your families during this challenging time. We are in this together, even as the constraints which have been imposed upon us undermine the very heart of who we are as a worshipping community of faith.

I want to assure you that your church staff and clergy are meeting regularly, and working creatively, to maintain our bonds of fellowship in Jesus. We are available to each of you by either email, text, or phone. The phones are being monitored daily at the church office, and we are making phone check-in calls to our parishioners. Please let us know your pastoral needs as they arise.

Worship is not cancelled; we are just worshipping in a different way. We've heard from many of you expressing appreciation for our online service last weekend. We will continue to record a weekly worship service and post it to our website for your viewing. Join us online this Sunday. So that you can follow along with the service, we will be sending you a service leaflet by email with all of the words printed out. Please check our website at cotgs.org for weekly updates and other correspondence. We will be communicating by email regularly with you during this time.

At our staff meeting this morning via conference call, we discussed creative ways to offer online classes, and other educational opportunities. As members of Good Shepherd, you all have access to RightNow Media, a video based Christian library (see the eblast that was sent out last week). Take advantage of this free membership. We are all new to this virtual community stuff and need some encouragement to step out and engage this new process. In a time when we are more isolated than ever, we need each other more than ever. Let's commit to staying connected.

Following the guidance of our health and medical officials, our Bishop, and our Governor, we will continue to suspend all "in person worship" and group meetings until further notice. I will be sending out a weekly email update on our status, as we continue to monitor an ever-changing environment. We are praying for a quick end to this temporary interruption in our daily lives.

I want to encourage you all to avoid the temptation of being absorbed by fear and anxiety, and to lean into your faith in Christ, who is with you, and look for the hidden blessings that are the result of this challenging time. Perhaps, this will be a productive time of simplifying our lives and taking stock of the things that really matter, our relationships with our families, with one another, and with Jesus. Read a good book, check-in with your loved ones and those who are vulnerable and draw your strength and comfort from God's Word.

Be safe, stay well, and keep the faith!

Yours in Christ,
Milton+

Dear Good Shepherd Family and Friends,

March 16, 2020

For the last three weeks we have worked hard to meet the challenge of maintaining our parish life in health and safety. We have gathered for worship and fellowship while implementing practices designed to keep the coronavirus at bay.

Even so, public health and medical officials have shared their sober assessment regarding the contagious nature of COVID-19 and the dangers posed by community spread. They cite Italy, which had 62 coronavirus cases on February 22 and two-and-half weeks later has more than 10,000 cases.

Medical officials stress the importance of suspending all gatherings, including worship and other meetings, so that we can help flatten the curve of the virus to ensure the greatest number of hospital beds for those who become ill. Suspending the worship life of the church is not a decision that we have come to lightly, but the result of much prayer and consideration of the best advice we have.

While health officials report that the majority of those who contract COVID-19 will have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, for older people and those with underlying medical conditions, the virus can be severe. We can all help meet the call of Jesus to care for “the least of these” by heeding the advice of the public health officials. Our plan is as follows:

- **Good Shepherd is suspending our worship services and all group meetings from today, March 16th, through Friday, April 3rd. People are asked to stay home for the next two Sundays. Depending on how things evolve, we pray that we can reconvene for regular worship services on April 5th, for Palm Sunday.**
- **On Sunday, March 22nd, and Sunday, March 29th, parishioners are encouraged to participate in worship online from their homes.** We will be recording an modified worship service weekly and posting it to our website for your viewing on Sunday mornings with your family.
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- **We are cancelling our three remaining Lenten Suppers, originally scheduled for March 18th, 25th, and April 1st.**
- If you are in need of pastoral care, please call the church office at 361-882-1735.

- Your church staff will continue to labor in the vineyard each day, as well as doing some deep cleaning in our church meeting spaces. Some of us will be working from the church office, while others will be working remotely from home. All are available to you via email, or by phone.

In these times, we are reminded that we are not in control, and our true strength and peace comes from the Lord, who loves us, and is with us through all of life's uncertainties. Yesterday's collect spoke powerfully into our current environment:

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Keep the faith! Say your prayers. Don't give fear the upper hand. Look out for each other, and we will get through this together. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with your thoughts or concerns. I am keeping our Church Family, and our city in prayer. Lenten blessings to each of you.

Peace of the Lord be with you,

Milton+