



“Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace, from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ.

During worship last evening, I was reflecting on being called to serve as the shepherd (pastor) of Grace Lutheran Church. It is indeed an honor to serve you in this way and provide leadership. Truth be told, it is far easier for the shepherd to lead than when it is time to protect the flock from danger. I would not be a good shepherd if I continued to lead as though there were not potential dangers in the world around us.

We find ourselves in the reality of a pandemic, as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) sweeps around the globe. Health officials are asking everyone to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities. It is important for faith communities to promote education regarding coronavirus and preparations to mitigate the spread of the disease. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have provided guidelines for precautionary measures for faith communities, schools, and workplaces.

We are currently moving into a Phase 1 of response to COVID-19. There may be the need to enter additional phases, which are still being developed.

I know that there are a lot of questions, and there are limited answers right now as the information changes every day. To aid in the transparency and allow opportunity for voicing of questions or concerns **we will have an open forum this Sunday in Grace Hall Following worship.** This will allow the opportunity to navigate this terrain together.

In keeping with the guidelines of the CDC, we offer the following steps for Phase 1 in response to COVID-19:

1. Stay calm.

The CDC's first recommendation is to remain calm. The CDC guidelines for the coronavirus are similar to their guidelines for general flu abatement. It should be noted that this illness, while aggressive, belongs to the family of viruses that cause the common cold.

2. We make the following recommendations for general care and attendance.

- Anyone who is sick should stay home to avoid infecting others. Any person who has flu-like symptoms (high fever, coughing, runny nose, chills, body aches, fatigue, etc.) should refrain from attending worship services. Your health and the health of others is more important than attendance. Please use good judgement.
- People should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. It is important to get a good lather of soap, wash the front and back of hands and in between fingers, and then use a paper towel to dry hands, turn off the faucet, and open the restroom door. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol can be used. It is also important that people avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- If you have traveled or are traveling overseas check travel notices on the CDC website and comply with recommendations. Contact your local health department for assistance and advice if you have traveled recently to these countries.
- Please consider having a “Buddy” with whom you will check in regularly to make sure that you are healthy and to be able to assist in getting you assistance should needs arise.

3. Individual and communal practices of good health and hygiene.

- We will take steps to make sure that the Sanctuary and main areas are clean for worship and other events. This will involve cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- We have sinks available for the washing of hands in all the restrooms. Washing of hands with soap and water is preferred to using hand sanitizing gels. As a complement to handwashing, we will do our best to add hand sanitizer, especially in the Gathering Hall and Grace Hall. Currently, hand sanitizer is unavailable.

4. We have made some temporary changes to worship practices.

- For the Passing of the Peace, we will use the American Sign Language for “Peace be with you.”
- We will not pass the Offering Plates during the Offering. Instead, we will have the plates available at the back of the Sanctuary.
- Instead of using hand sanitizer, the Liturgist and Presider will scrub hands in the Sacristy before the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
- If you would prefer a blessing instead of receiving communion simply cross your arms across your chest when you come forward. In the same way, if you would prefer to only have wine or grape juice and not the bread or wafer, simply proceed to that station.
- The Pastor will refrain from shaking hands at the conclusion of the worship service.
- We will suspend the serving of donuts and coffee until further notice.

5. We have made the following temporary changes to other areas of ministry.

- We have suspended the Tuesday Morning Bible Study until further notice.
- We have suspended the Wednesday Soup Suppers until further notice.
- The hospitals have requested a suspension of non-essential visitors.
- Most, if not all, of the senior living communities have restrictions on visiting.
- Please still advise the church office of any needs and we can arrange for the on site chaplains to provide assistance.

7. We will continue to monitor alerts and information from the CDC and other governmental agencies.

You can also stay informed and up to date by monitoring information on the CDC website. Three helpful resources are:

- **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).** This webpage has the latest updates and Information and should be checked regularly.
- **What You Need to Know About Coronavirus Disease 2019.** This concise one-page fact sheet can be disseminated widely.
- **Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities.** This webpage includes recommendations for preventing the spread of coronavirus in homes, educational settings, workplaces, faith organizations, and at large gatherings.

I take very seriously the calling of serving as your shepherd, and the deep love that I have for this community of faith. These decisions were not easy to make, but it seems wrong to knowingly send the flock out into a storm. We will continue to monitor the situation and communicate when it is time to either move to Phase 2, or begin the process of returning to normal.

In Christ,
Pastor Mike

Pastor Michael Schmidt

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