



St. Peter's Lutheran Church
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www.stpetersverona.org

March 20, 2020

Dear St. Peter's members and friends,

Recently I saw an article on another church's website called "The Lenten Fast Nobody Wanted." That seems to be an accurate description of the times in which we live. As you know, COVID-19, the coronavirus, is on everyone's minds. Things are changing every day, sometimes hour by hour. We are sending out updates by email, but also wanted to reach out to all of you, including those without email. (If you are not receiving our emails, please check your spam folder or Promotions tab. If they aren't there, please contact me.)

On Friday, March 13, we received an email from our Bishop John Macholz strongly urging all congregations to **suspend in-person worship** immediately, for March 15, 22 and 29. Our Council agreed to follow his recommendation. In the days following, Council also decided to honor the community guidelines for all public places and **closed the St. Peter's building** through March 30. This includes all church-sponsored activities and individuals as well as outside groups. While we are not aware of any cases in the St. Peter's family, we are committed to doing our part to slow community spread of the virus, and that includes following guidelines for physical distance between individuals.

At this point, I fully expect that we will need to extend that deadline in order to continue to keep people safe. However, there are many ways to stay connected and care for each other as the St. Peter's family. Remember—we are all members of the body of Christ, and continue to be part of His body, even when we cannot gather together in person!

Here are some of the ways we continue to be the church, wherever we are:

- **Worship remotely.** Technology now allows us to do so much more for sharing worship time together. We are about to debut our new YouTube channel, which will include Sunday worship experiences tailored for this new medium. We continue to post links on Facebook as well and I will keep doing Facebook Live on Fridays at 12:15 pm. If you do have email, please keep a close eye on your inbox as we will be sending out more regular updates about this. We've posted a link to the channel on our website: www.stpetersverona.org.

- **Checking in with people.** Our Commissioned Lay Ministers, Council members, and I will be reaching out to check on people. However, now is a great time for you to get out your church directory and call or text people to find out how they are. If you are comfortable with technology, try using Zoom or Facetime or Skype to connect visually as well as by voice. These tools have come a long way and seeing other people's faces really does make a big difference!
- **Coordinating through the office.** At this time, the church office remains open for remote assistance only, so please feel free to contact Kathy Piemonte there at (315) 363-5211 or office@stpetersverona.org. The hours are 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, Tuesday through Friday. If you need something, we can leave it on the bench outside the church for you. **Please, even if you have a church key, do not enter the building without notifying the office.** Marie is busily disinfecting rooms and closing them off as she goes. We don't want her to have to repeat her work.
- **Helping others out.** If you are healthy and not in the high-risk categories, and looking for a way to volunteer, we are compiling a list of folks who could run brief errands (groceries, prescriptions, etc.) for those who might need it. If you need this type of assistance, please call the office and we will match you up with someone who can help. The Verona Food Pantry on Germany Road remains open (Tuesday 1-2:30 pm and Thursday 6-7:30 pm) and the Blessing Box at the Verona Fire Department is a great way to help people from a safe distance.
- **Brightening others' days.** If you have kids at home, or anyone who would like to get creative, feel free to draw or color pictures or cards for those who might be feeling lonely or isolated. Send them to the church office and we can send them out to whomever might need them most.
- **Helping our finances stay afloat.** Unfortunately, during this time our financial obligations still need to be met. I know some of you are facing uncertain futures as your own income has ceased or been reduced, but if you are able, we *greatly* appreciate your continuing support. The best way to do this is to send a check through the mail to the church, in order to keep offerings in one place. Council has designated volunteers to count the offerings and prepare the deposits weekly. We have also created a PayPal account to receive support electronically. There are some minor fees associated with this method (2.2% of your donation plus 30 cents per transaction) but it is faster. The link is on our website under the "Ministries" tab at the top.
- **Praying together.** For some time now I have been setting my watch alarm for 12:40 pm every day to remind me to pray at that particular time. I invite you to join me in this discipline. Of course, prayer is valuable any time of day! If you need a change of scenery, you are welcome to come and park your car in the church parking lot and pray there anytime.

We need to be praying for health care professionals, first responders, public policymakers, funeral directors, and those who will need intense medical care as a result of this virus. But we also need to be praying for teachers, parents of young children, those who work at grocery stores and Walmart and places that are stressful right now, those with anxiety and mental health issues, and small businesses that are trying desperately to innovate in order to survive. I'm sure you can think of many others who need prayer at this time. I am praying for each and every one of you.

We have added a coronavirus update to our voicemail system at church, so if you ever need to know the latest, feel free to call (315) 363-5211 after hours and it will be the first thing you hear (press 1 to skip it). And of course, you can always reach out to me on my cell phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by email at pastor@stpetersverona.org.

Finally, let me share a word of good news. The church is not a building. The church is the people, called together by the Holy Spirit to do God's work in the world and love people with the love of Christ. We can do that, and in fact, we *are* doing that. Nearly everyone I speak with during this time has asked me how they can help.

So if you are getting lonely, or stir-crazy, or demoralized after making a trip to Walmart or the grocery store, remember that we can still answer the Holy Spirit's call to rise above ourselves and the reactive behavior we are seeing. Show a little extra grace to yourself and to others, and remember that we will get through this. Whenever we can be together as a church family again, it will indeed be a shared experience of resurrection.

Together in Christ,

Pastor Katie Yahns
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