

A Pastoral Letter - March 17

Today is St. Patrick's Day. Also what would have been my father's 96th birthday. I am glad he is with the Lord and not here during this time. I don't know if I would have been able to visit him and care for him with the restrictions that are in place. That would have been tough on both of us. So thank you, Lord, for taking him home before all this!

Are there other good things you can think of during this time? Things that God mercifully has put in place for us for just a time as this? What good might also come out of this? In confusing and uncertain times, it is good to think about such things and be reassured that though we get surprised with some new item of news nearly every single day, our Lord does not. He knows. He cares. And He is with us.

I wanted to give you an update on some things . . .

(1.) **Services at Church Wednesday and Sunday** - We are still currently planning on both and will try to do so as long as we can, and continue to offer the online live stream as well. We realize that our WebEx service was not designed for this and the quality isn't the best, and your Elders and I are working on improvements. For Wednesday night, we'll be on WebEx again, but stay tuned for how we might be able to do this better.

Along with this, I will be posting the FULL SERVICE on our web site instead of just the outline normally in the bulletin. So you will have everything you need to follow along, even if you do not have a hymnal. It will be in PDF format for viewing or download.

(2.) **Sunday Morning Bible Class and Sunday School** - These classes have been discontinued until further notice. Only a handful of folks came for these last Sunday anyway, so this isn't a big change for most. It also seems like a good compromise to still offer our Divine Service but not over-extend our time together.

HOWEVER, your Elders and I are looking into providing some form of online Bible Class and/or Sunday School. Probably not on Sunday morning before church, but some other time. Again, stay tuned!

(3.) **Communion** - Of course, those joining us through the online streamed Divine Service cannot receive the Sacrament of the Altar with us. Your Elders and I are planning on offering the Lord's Supper at regional sites where our members live, in small groups. For people at particular risk, Pastor will try to care for them individually. Again, stay tuned! **Check our web site regularly for all the latest information.**

(4.) **Members in Need** - Some of our folks will undoubtedly fall on hard times and need help. **If this is you, please ask for help!** That is why we are the Body of Christ together in this place! If you need food or medicine delivered, financial assistance, or something else, we can try to help. Your Commission on Mercy is working on this and will be our coordinators. Be aware also of your friends and neighbors. As a church, we may not be able to help, but each of us can help as friends, neighbors, and citizens.

(5.) **Materials** - Materials that you normally pick-up at church will be either delivered to you when Pastor comes to offer Communion, or can be mailed to you. This includes things like the Portals of Prayer, Lutheran Witness magazine, etc.

(6.) **Family Devotions** - Through these crazy days, our foundation, rock, and refuge is the faithfulness of our Lord and His love for us. Spend time in the Word of God and prayer! The devotion page that is in your bulletin every week is on both our Church Blog and available for download on our Church web site. Since you may be working from home and with your kids home from school, maybe this is a good time to log on and join Pastor for his Morning Prayer on the Web every morning.

Remember also that our Web site has a lot of resources for you. Pastor's sermons for the last 17 years are there, videos teaching the catechism and the Bible stories we use with them, audio recordings of past Good Shepherd seminars, and more.

But here's the bottom line: **rest in the love of Christ for you.** In the midst of these uncertain, confusing, fast-changing, unsettled times, Christ doesn't change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He will not leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He is your rock of refuge, a very certain help in time of need (Psalm 46).

So as I wrote to you last week, don't panic. Be sensible, yes. Take precautions, yes. (Wash your hands, well and often!) But don't panic. Get the facts, don't listen to the rest.

This too will pass, and what joy we will have to be all together again when it does!

Pastor Douthwaite

And remember to pray for . . .

Your pastor! And your church leaders who are trying to make good and wise decisions and care for you all as best we can.

Our nation's leaders, for wisdom and guidance.

For those who have contracted the coronavirus, for healing.

For health care workers and first responders, for protection.

For those who will lose their jobs at this time, or whose incomes will be severely cut.

For our college students who may miss graduation and other significant senior recognitions and honors.

For our children as they try to school at home.