



Dear Friends,

As more people are exposed to the COVID-19 virus, our church is working hard to ensure that the people of First Presbyterian stay as safe as possible. Right now, we have very little idea how COVID-19 will spread in the Quad Cities - or how safe practices may change in the future. In order to prevent possible spread of the virus, in-person worship is canceled this Sunday, along with Sunday School, Musikgarten, and ACE. David Fairweather's funeral has also been postponed.

We admit that canceling in-person worship goes against some of our favorite Christian traditions. In times of trouble, there is nothing more comforting than the presence of fellow believers. Church is a place where all of us, from the youngest to the oldest, can come and feel safe. It is a place for those who are sick or recovering to connect with friends, and those who are lonely to be able to share hugs, handshakes, and food together. Unfortunately, that close-knit community means that our worship services could put many people's health at risk during a sickness outbreak. The safety of our members is our highest priority right now, and we are very aware that many of our members are considered high-risk.

In difficult times like this, we need to hear Christ's good news more than ever. Our planned worship service will be taped and made available online and on public access TV, just like a regular Sunday service. Look for the service online Sunday morning, and please join us in prayer and worship. Our taped service will not give us space to share joys and concerns - so contact the church office if you'd like to share concerns with a pastor, pray together, or just have someone to talk to. We will also share prayer requests on Facebook. Remember that even on the weekends, calling the church office will connect you with the pastor on call. As concerns about spending time in public grow, you may feel lonely or afraid - know that you are not alone, and be sure to reach out to a pastor.

At our Session meeting on Monday night, we will discuss our future plans for church safety. Be prepared to hear more details from us within a week, including information about future worship, other large events, and ways to help those most in need. Regardless of how many people may become ill, COVID-19 is already having an economic impact on workers - in the days and weeks to come, stay tuned for ways our church can help those most in need, either through our pledges or actions. This outbreak does not decrease our commitment to mission, so please continue to send in your pledges, whether via mail or online.

As of right now, no weekday events have been canceled, and the church office will remain open. Our staff have already begun working hard to ensure that our building is as safe as possible. The sanctuary, classrooms, hallways, and nursery have been disinfected and wiped down. We have received suggestions from the Presbytery about safe worship practices, and will work on a detailed plan for best practices in the future. For better or worse, we have plenty of space to hold classes and choir rehearsals with the recommended six feet of space between people. Our Session and staff will continue to work on ways to keep our congregation safe at our many different events.

Whether you're on Iowa Street or anywhere else, there are many common-sense precautions we can take which could cut short the spread of COVID-19. If you have a fever or flu-like symptoms, call a doctor and stay home - this is one of those glorious times when discretion really is the better part of valor. Limit your visits to hospitals and retirement communities (we've already started increasing our cards and phone calls). If you are not comfortable leaving your house and need groceries or other items, please contact the pastor on call. Be sure to wash your hands often, scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, and use hand sanitizer when a sink isn't available. Avoid touching your face, and cover your mouth when you cough. These practices are useful during any cold and flu season! For more information, look at <https://www.scottcountyiowa.com/health/post/novel-coronavirus-covid-19> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Friends, we hope that in a week or two, things will be back to normal - but know that our church will be careful and serious about potential health threats. We love our congregation, and want to make sure that everybody is safe. The best and scariest part of church is that we are all vulnerable people, who come together to love God and love each other. We ask you all to come together in prayer, via phone calls and cards, and to remind each other of God's constant love for us in difficult times. As the Apostle Paul urges us in Romans 12:12, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer." We are grateful to serve Christ alongside you all as we work to keep our congregation safe.

Peace,

Pastor Mark and Pastor Katie.