



IMPORTANT

NOTICE

.....PLEASE READ

**IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND SHARE WITH THOSE
NOT IN WORSHIP TODAY:**

After much prayerful consideration and reading recommendations from both denominations, the Leadership Team and I have come up with the following plan for our church family, to be in place during the pandemic:

1. Worship per usual on March 15 with greeters encouraging people to sit 6' apart and the use of air hugs, elbow bumps, air handshakes, etc. and encouraging no touching.

Children's activities and youth activities cancelled until April.

If someone you know has a condition that makes them more vulnerable, PLEASE GET ON THE PHONE AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO STAY HOME. For these folks, it could be a serious negative decision to come out into the public. Who are these folks? Anyone with chronic lung disease like COPD or asthma. Anyone taking chemo. Anyone not feeling well. Anyone taking meds that impact their autoimmune system. Those who are over 65, even if they feel well. No one would be happy if these folks contracted this virus! God understands. We don't need to panic, folks, but we don't need to take unnecessary risks either.

2. Having said that, Sunday activities are cancelled for March 22 and 29. We are working on recording services for you to worship with from home via the church web site. Ellen is working to find other means to offer support and encouragement to you during this time.

3. The sanctuary and prayer room are available during regular office hours (Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, 9 - 2:30). Missy and I will both be available for those who need special attention. We will be taking extra precautions to try to make the building as safe as we can.

4. Frank, Missy and Ellen will operate as normal. We will be in the office working – however, we discourage unnecessary interactions with us (unless you have cabin fever) and ask that you please respect the safe distance between people (6') if you do come in to visit. We will be working on a mailing regarding the church timeline so you can study the information in the safety of your home. We will work on this as a congregation during the first worship service we are told we can safely hold. Kay will not have any music rehearsals until April.

5. Ellen will be available to anyone needing extra attention during this time period.

6. Whispers of Hope Monday afternoon group will be set up in the fellowship hall with extra tables so those who want to meet can do so safely. The other small groups (book clubs for example) will be cancelled until it is safe to meet again.

7. Please use the telephone to check on people in the congregation OR send notes to people OR use social media to connect with others in our congregation during this time. Isolation is a serious side effect to quarantining. All of us need to ensure that people like Naomi Van Camp, Mary Moyer, Fred and Linda Wood and others going through very difficult situations feel loved and cared for by the congregation during this time.

I am available via cell/text (315) 521-2593, home phone (315) 651-4213, or email transitionalpastorhelpsunited@gmail.com – any hour of the day or night. We will get through this challenge with God's help and the support of each other!

Here are some suggestions to shift this from negative to positive:

- Do some spring cleaning while you are home. Great time to clean out closets, basement, and the garage, and gather items for the Whale of a Sale.
- Spend some time intentionally talking with God and listening for God's still small voice.
- Does your yard need attention? You now have time to get out in the fresh air and rake.
- Have a book you have been wanting to read? Now you can do that.
- Remember the "old" days when people wrote letters or sent cards to others? Now would be a great time to give those a try and brighten others' days at the same time.
- Know how to email? Another way to stay in touch with people.
- How about board games with the family and family meals?
- Have kids? How about inviting them to do projects with you, like making cookies or an art activity or playing outside?
- Movie night, anyone? (Safely in the confines of your home)

The best thing we can do during this time is to take the metaphorical lemons we have been given and turn them into lemonade!

God is with us, folks! Remember all the times God has gotten each of us through very difficult times. He never abandons us. He is always by our side. God bless! Ellen

Five Ways To Be The Church When Church Is Canceled*

Seems like the notion of "cancel culture" just took on a whole new dimension.

School — canceled. Vacation— canceled. Basketball tournaments and horse races— both the lifeblood of my people— canceled. Conferences, retreats, events of all kinds— canceled, eliminated, done-zo. In a matter of a few days, this thing has gone from "wash your hands and cover your cough" to a significant lifestyle change that most of us have not experienced in our lifetime.

Of all the cancellations, perhaps the most unnerving of all is the call, in many areas, to cancel church worship services. This seems counterintuitive in a time when people are anxious and need community; when people are facing economic uncertainty and need support; and when people are fearful and need the comfort of prayer and connection. And yet— we have to acknowledge that "large gatherings" are a hotspot for the spread of disease, and that church services can be pretty cozy experiences as far as personal space goes. For all of our best efforts to eliminate hand shaking and peace passing, and to modify communion practices, the best way to protect folks right now is to keep them apart.

It's sad. It's painful. It goes against every impulse of church leaders who proclaim faith in a God who is bigger than human fear. And it rubs up against the ego of those who think of themselves as hardy enough to weather any storm and get to church early to get the coffee going.

I get it. I really do. But sometimes, painful as it is, cancelling is the responsible, compassionate thing to do, and anything else is just hubris. Think of this illness as the black ice of liability. If there is a blizzard, you might be able to get to church. But if you can't clear the sidewalks and the parking lots, do you really want to invite people into a hazard situation—the invisible threat that is just under the surface? This is like that. Sure, folks who are not sick are going to feel like they should still come to church. But they could be carrying something they don't know they have yet, and pass it right on to their elderly or immunocompromised neighbor.

There are many unknowns here. There is unprecedented territory ahead, and nobody can say how long it might last. So if it does come down to canceling services at your place, here are some things to remember, and some ways to keep “being the Church,” even when you can’t be in the church building.

1. Support your pastors. And elders, and trustees and board members— whoever has to make the really hard decisions about whether and how to gather in times of uncertainty. There is no road map for this, and there is no one right answer. Trust that the folks who ultimately make the call spent some time in prayer, discernment, and very difficult conversations. Know that they heavily weighed consequences, including your disappointment, and ultimately did what they thought was the best thing for the wellbeing of the community. Thank them for having your best interests at heart, and then

2. Send in your pledge. This may seem like a small thing in the grand scheme right now, but trust me. It matters that you continue to get your offering in, as long as you are fiscally able. This is a great time to reexamine online giving options, or encourage folks to sign up for automatic withdrawal. Even the healthiest congregations can find themselves in the hole, and quick, after just a few Sundays of missed offerings. If you can’t give online, mail in a check, send a carrier pigeon, do what you have to do. Even if the building is empty, bills and salaries need to be paid; what’s more, you’re helping your church maintain mission commitments to the community in a time when that commitment is more important than ever.

3. Check on your neighbors. You older neighbors, your neighbor on chemo, your neighbor whose kid relies on free school lunch, your neighbor who still has to go to work and could use help with childcare... Any time you help someone in your proximity, you are living out the values of your faith community. You are embodying what the whole gospel thing is about, which takes church out of the building and brings it to life for others. This is what we go to church to learn how to do— it is ‘for such a time as this’ that you have spent all those other Sundays in worship.

4. Pray for your church family. And send notes. Make phone calls. All the things that we do for shut-ins, do for each other now that we are all shut-ins, so to speak. We are one body, even when that body is not together in the flesh. There are plenty of ways to stay connected in spirit, and care for each others’ spiritual needs.

5. Practice Sabbath. For some, this shutdown of life as we know it is going to cause significant economic hardship. In the spirit of #3, care for your neighbor as best as you can. In the meantime, recognize if your own discomfort is just inconvenience, and keep that perspective. Recognize that downtime can be a gift— an imposed sabbath of time to sit still and be with your family, without the usual rush of places to be and things to accomplish. Read together; prepare meals together (can you share with a neighbor? #3 and repeat); hell, binge watch some Netflix together. When’s the last time everybody was home for this long? Talk about what you can learn from this season. Talk about your blessings. Play a game. Make something. Listen to music. It really doesn’t matter. Any of these things can be worshipful in their own way, if by ‘worship’ we mean rest and renewal by way of connecting with God and others.

“Cancel culture” might have a whole new meaning; but “let the Church be the Church” still stands.

*This letter appeared in Patheos and was written by Erin Wathen on March 13, 2020.

