

*“Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.”* From Pandemic, a poem by Lynn Ungar

Dear Friends,

This is how Bishop Brian Prior began his message to church leaders today: “do not reach out your hands...reach out your heart.”

To protect those in our faith communities who may be most vulnerable to the Coronavirus – those with underlying health conditions and who are over the age of 60 – we must adopt alternative ways to reach out to one other, to show we care, to pass the peace, even to worship.

First, we must take care of our personal health – wash our hands often, don’t go out if we are sick, reach out for help by phone rather than in person. See the attached pdf from ECMN for more helpful information or go to www.CDC.gov.

Second, we must consider the public health, that is, the health of others. The scientists are telling us to avoid crowds and to try to remain 6 feet from other people. If we follow these recommendations now, we are told it will slow the virus and allow our health system to keep up with the needs of those who will need hospitalization later. Canceling in-person church services or other events like Sunday School are ways to help protect the health of others, the public health. Bishop Prior has asked your church leaders to make these decisions based on our circumstances: the age of our members, whether they have underlying health conditions, the size of our worship space and how crowded it is at worship, and whether we feel we can keep people safe.

Bishop Prior has asked us to implement certain changes immediately: not shaking hands at the exchange of the peace, not passing the offertory plate, not receiving wine at communion, not offering food. These are all efforts to protect the public generally and our parishioners specifically.

After prayerful consideration, **we believe it is in the best interests of both our members and the public, to not hold services, nor Sunday School, this Sunday, March 15, 2020.** Decisions about future services will be made as circumstances dictate, and we will advise everyone by email and on our website of the status of the weekly worship service. Morning Prayer at Grand Arbor on Fridays has also been canceled until further notice.

As stated by the Dean of our Cathedral, our decision to cancel worship "...is a practical, life-saving way for us to be and to build up the Beloved Community by taking pause together – giving thanks for the life we share, recognizing and celebrating those things we've "given up for Lent," all toward the reward of savoring them all the more when they resume at a time that is safe for all of us."

So how do we worship when we are not together? We must adapt in these trying times. Below are several resources, which we encourage you to try.

As we navigate these unusual circumstances, don't be a stranger! Keep in touch with fellow members by phone or by email. Let us know if you or someone you know is in need. As your church family, we are here for you. For pastoral care or information, call 320-763-3201. Thank you and please stay safe and well.

JoEllen Doebbert, Sr. Warden
Rev. Thomas Sinning
On behalf of the Vestry