

Dear Friends in Christ, after much research and prayer, and prayer and discussion, and more prayer, out of an abundance of caution, I have decided to cancel *all* worship services beginning tomorrow, March 18 (midweek scheduled at St. John), until Easter Sunday, April 12th.

It grieves me that we will lose out on the journey of Lent, especially the Holy Week services. It grieves me that we will miss the physical "fellowship of believers, the communion of saints," at a time when being together is what we most need. But it's our responsibility to play our part in controlling the spread of this virus, and to keep *our* part of the body of Christ healthy.

At the same time, we know that Christ is greater than any pandemic. There are things we can do "together" at the same time without being in the actual presence of one another. I share items that have come to me by email:

In this Lenten Season when our churches should be filled with worshipers reflecting on our Savior and the greatest gift ever known to mankind, the forgiveness of our sins, we can--we *must*--continue to give thanks for the daily blessings we have. Let us set aside 5 minutes of time on Sundays at 10:00 a.m. and ask the divine Healer to give comfort to the families affected by this sickness and watch over the caregivers who minister to all who are ill. Let us ask for his help in curing the disease and restoring perhaps a more humble balance to our lives, and our life together, a balance that may reflect more closely the values of our Lord Jesus and his call to each of us to live out his commandments: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. Just 5 minutes on Sunday morning at 10:00. (Sent to me by Dick Gray of St. Stephen; slightly altered)

There are many Christian churches that have live or video worship on-line. We don't have that capability, but St. John's in Spencer has an outline of worship and a video sermon from Pastor Rebekah Tarras. Visit <http://www.stjohnsspencer.com>. There must be other alternatives on-line.

Please check on neighbors and friends, especially those in high-risk groups. Share your supplies with those in need. Make phone calls to those who feel particularly isolated during this time, especially those who live alone and those who live in care centers that have restricted visiting.

At St. John in Wien, Cathy Mueller will post a weekly Sunday sermon and any updates on the status of the congregation. Visit <http://www.stjohnelcaedgar.org>.

My cell phone is always with me (715-352-2492) if I can serve you in any way (except in-person). (Please call, except for emergencies, 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.) If any of you become ill, with the coronavirus or flu, please let me know so we can pray for you. We'll keep the prayer chains at each congregation active.

Things have been changing rapidly in this crisis of virus. I hope and pray that by Easter Sunday we'll be cleared to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord together. Call if you have questions. Call if you know someone (member or not) who has a need we might be able to meet: delivery of food or other goods (if they're available) or a phone call. If you have a hymnal at home, check out the many prayers in the front (LBW p. 42ff; ELW p. 72, both before and after).

I close with a prayer from each hymnal. LBW p. 50: Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, rest the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous. In your love, give us all this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ELW p. 77: God our creator, through whose providing care we enjoy all goodness and life, turn our eyes to your mercy in this time of confusion and loss. Comfort this nation as we mourn; shine your light on those whose only companion is darkness; and teach us all so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to your wisdom; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

I'm sending this to both councils and others whose email I have. Please forward to others in the congregations as you are able.

Pastor Gail