

Dear members of the St. John's Church community,

In light of the rapidly changing developments and after conversations with members of our Church council, Executive Team, and staff, we have come to the difficult conclusion that it is best we cancel all St. John's IN-PERSON worship services, programming, and activities for the next ten days to help contain the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). We will make decisions in 10-day increments. Thus, we will be closed from **March 15-25** and will evaluate continually as the situation evolves. We will likely communicate with you between those dates, but will certainly make more information available to you about our church's status by March 25 for the next 10-day cycle. The primary reasons behind this decision are:

- Care and concern for the health of all members and visitors to St. John's, including the senior adult population at St. John's that is particularly vulnerable to the virus
- The increasing admonition of public health agencies to not encourage bringing large groups of people together in one place
- The significant impact "social distancing" seems to make on reducing the spread of the virus
- Doing our part in "flattening the curve" and buying precious time so our local and national health care facilities are not overwhelmed by an explosion of the virus
- Our online presence, which makes it possible for us to still be in community through placing worship, Bible study, and other content front and center on our website and in select social media locations

As we approached this in our own conversations over the past two days, as well as through conversation with other ELCA pastors of congregations in the metro, we have centered on Christ's admonition to us to "love the neighbor" as secondary only to loving God. Approaching this with faith and not fear, as well as with the best information and critical thinking we have, we feel doing our part to help slow the transmission of the virus is the most loving and faithful thing we can do to care for all our neighbors here at St. John's, locally, and even around the world. Even one of our local pastoral colleagues said, "I would rather be wrong on the front end of this than be wrong on the back end." We agree.

One of our Church council members shared this from a rabbi: "Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise." Our Church council found this to be a comforting and appropriate word of Christian encouragement, challenge, and grace as we find creative ways to stay connected as a church family through this time.

Here are some things for you to know:

Our staff will continue to work both on-site and remotely, and this includes pastoral care. During this time, you can email staff directly and can find their email addresses on our website: www.sjlcl.org. If you have a need and don't know who to contact, please call the church office at 952-469-4916 and your call will be directed to the appropriate staff person.

We'll be producing a modified worship experience that will be available via video. You'll be able to find it on our website and our social media platforms. This will be an important way for us to stay connected to God and one another. Look for Sunday and Wednesday worship experiences, as well as a special youth and family experience on Fridays.

Your continued generosity toward our operating budget will be more important than ever during this time. That's especially true as we seek to take care of our amazing staff. If you're not using electronic giving, please consider using it or signing up for it today: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/269696. You can still mail your offering to the church, as well, at: St. John's Lutheran Church, P.O. Box 955, Lakeville, MN 55044. And if you're not a sustaining member of this ministry that we share, we can't think of a more important time to step in. A commitment of \$5 or \$10 a week can make a huge difference if we all join together. Click on the link above to set up your own sustaining offering to St. John's.

Now is the time to especially put our hope, trust, and faith in Christ Jesus. We do not need to panic. God's got this, just as God has carried all of us through countless challenges. Remember Jesus calling out to his disciples when they were fishing on the Sea of Galilee and were only focused on why they weren't catching any fish? Once they listened to Jesus and obeyed his command to cast their nets to the other side, they caught so many fish they could barely haul them in. Let us turn away from fears we may have and rather turn toward trustingly listening to our Lord Jesus, who always says to us, "Have no fear, little flock."

watch your emails for further updates. We are here for you and for our whole St. John's Church family and community. We'll get through this together in faith, hope, and love.

In Christ,
Your pastors, Church council, and staff leaders