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Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church

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March 13, 2020

*For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

*- 2 Timothy 1:7*

Dear Shepherd of the Mountains family and friends,

In recent weeks, the congregation has been making adjustments to our worship practices to do our part in protecting our more vulnerable neighbors from the spread of COVID-19 or Coronavirus. In summary:

* If you are ill, please stay home.
* If you find that you are one of the most vulnerable to Coronavirus, please consider staying home.
* Please wash your hands with soap frequently for at least twenty seconds. In our church bathrooms, we’ve placed the lyrics to hymn verses and refrains that last the appropriate amount of time and help you warm up for Sunday morning!
* We have avoided handshakes and found other ways to share a sign of peace. Rather than pass the offering plates, we have made them stationary.
* Hand sanitizer in the sanctuary is for your use. At the 10 am service, it will be offered by the ushers before receiving communion.
* For the time being, we are suspending the use of the common cup and moving to individual cups of wine or grape juice.

Epidemiologists have taught us that the best way to stop an outbreak such as one we are currently witnessing is to voluntarily social distance, even when we are not experiencing symptoms ourselves. While changes can of course feel awkward or inconvenient, we exercise self-control and make these adjustments not out of a sense of fear, but out of concern and love for one another.

As your pastor, I am in contact with church and interfaith colleagues, and monitoring the recommendations from St. John’s Health and local government, as well as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization’s websites for the most current information, suggestions, and best practices.

There is a possibility that we will suspend gathering for in-person worship for a time. I will be working with my local colleagues, our worship board, and our church council to make those decisions. Please sure to check your email, the church website or facebook page, for announcements.

Our love of neighbor isn’t limited to social distancing and hygiene. Even as we limit reaching out with our hands, reach out with your heart. Reach out with your words.

* Please don’t join in racism or xenophobia. While this virus started in Wuhan, China, it’s not a Chinese virus. The virus doesn’t discriminate; we shouldn’t either. If you see that racism or xenophobia pop up, do your best to call it out for what it is.
* Be informed and mindful of those impacted by the spread of this disease, or exceptions to social distancing. Some gatherings, like AA, are critical to maintaining a person’s health. Blood drives continue to be important, particularly when donors, like college students, aren’t on campus to participate in regular drives. Not all of our community members have the luxury of working from home and being able to pay rent or put food on the table. If you are out, tip well. If you are going shopping, consider getting a grocery list from a vulnerable neighbor and doing theirs, too. More broadly, with our community’s economic reliance on tourism, there is a strong likelihood that this will negative financial ramifications for our local businesses. How might our church be of help?
* Pray. If you’re struggling for words, the Lutheran World Federation created the following intercessory prayer:

*O God our Healer, show your compassion for the whole human family that is in turmoil and burdened with illness and with fear.*

*Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Come to our aid as the coronavirus spreads globally, heal those who are sick, support and protect their families and friends from being infected.*

*Hear our cry, O God, l****isten to our prayer.***

*Grant us your spirit of love and self-discipline so that we may come together, working to control and eliminate the coronavirus. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Make us vigilant, attentive, and proactive in the eradication of all diseases, malaria, dengue, HIV & AIDS, and others [may be named out- loud or in silence]... that create suffering and often result in death for many people.*

*Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Heal our self-centeredness and indifference that makes us worry only when the virus threatens us, open ways beyond timidity and fear that too easily ignore our neighbor. Hear our cry, O God****, listen to our prayer.***

*Strengthen and encourage those in public health services and in the medical profession: care-givers, nurses, attendants, doctors, all who commit themselves to caring for the sick and their families. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Inspire, give insight and hope to all researchers focused on developing a vaccine. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Sustain all workers and business owners who suffer loss of livelihood due to shut-downs, quarantines, closed borders, and other restrictions... protect and guard all those who must travel. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Guide the leaders of the nations that they speak the truth, halt the spread of misinformation and act with justice so that all your family may know healing.*

*Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Heal our world, heal our bodies, strengthen our hearts and our minds, and in the midst of turmoil, give us hope and peace. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Hold in your gentle embrace all who have died and who will die this day. Comfort their loved ones in their despair. Hear our cry, O God,* ***listen to our prayer.***

*Remember all your family, the entire human race, and all your creation, in your love.* ***Amen.***

Dear ones, right now let us practice being (rather than going) in peace

to love and serve our Lord.

Pastor Inger