

Pastoral Statement on COVID-19

Since this statement was first published, the session has voted to suspend worship services.

With reports about the spread of the coronavirus (or COVID-19), we want you to know that the health of our community is of utmost concern to the pastor, session and staff of this congregation. We will be staying current with public health guidelines, follow best practices for hygiene, and exercise an abundance of caution and care in responding to this situation. This World Health Organization website provides answers to frequent questions. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

Since passing the peace and/or greeting on another are particular concerns at this time, instead of shaking hands or embracing, other options include a verbal greeting, other gestures such as an elbow bump, smile or bow. These are all ways to express Christ's call to reconciliation in the church and world.

The congregation is encouraged to participate, or not, according to their comfort, conscience and condition. Folding one's arms across the chest and smiling or nodding can be a gracious way to decline physical contact in greeting lines or other public encounters. Others should honor these decisions and refrain from making judgment or taking offense.

Use common sense and your best judgment in protecting your own health and the health of others. Reduce unnecessary travel, touch and contact to avoid placing yourself or others at greater risk. If you are feeling ill or have recently experienced symptoms of an infectious disease, we ask that you stay home from public events and/or keep a safe distance from others to limit contagion. Even if you believe you are not sick, but are coughing or sneezing, be mindful of the anxiety this may cause in others around you.

Other recommendations:

- ✓ Wash your hands frequently using soap and water and lathering for twenty seconds.
- ✓ Sneeze/cough into a tissue or your elbow (throw tissue away immediately)
- ✓ Stay out of crowds (100 is considered a crowd) especially if you are over 60 and have underlying medical conditions.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water

If you decide to stay home from worship or other events due to illness, please find ways to stay in touch — through prayer circles, small groups, ministry teams, social media, or emails and phone calls. We don't want to create situations where those who are ill also feel lonely, isolated or outcast. We want to pray for you and provide other forms of assistance and care as needed.

Let us be faithful and vigilant in our prayer for those nations, communities, families and individuals most affected by this outbreak, and for the medical personnel and government officials seeking to respond. Let us resist and reject fear and suspicion based on ethnicity or nationality; this virus is affecting people of all races and ages. Let us be generous in supporting organizations that provide assistance and support public health in our area and around the world.

Above all, let us remember and rejoice that “nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Brief Statement of Faith*; Rom. 8:38–39).

Pastor Tom