

GOD IS WITH US! GOD IS WITH YOU!

Jesus said, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:10).

In the midst of this new coronavirus pandemic, our lives are being disrupted in all kinds of ways. Public schools have been closed indefinitely; the University has cancelled in-person classes; many have lost their jobs or had their hours cut back at work or are starting to work from home; and now government and public health officials are telling us not to gather in groups of more than 10. **“Social distancing” to prevent the rapid spread of the virus is what we need to do now, to protect not only ourselves but to protect the most vulnerable among us.**

As a result, our church leaders have decided to cancel in-person worship, events, and meetings at First English through April 13. The situation will be re-evaluated at that time. This was a very difficult decision, especially because it includes Holy Week and Easter, the most significant week in the life of the church. It is done as an act of solidarity and love for our neighbors. We all need to do everything we can to try to slow down the spread of the virus and not overwhelm our health care system.

As Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton, has said, during this time of disruption, starting now during this Lenten season, we need to fast from physical touch and take this opportunity to pause and reflect and breathe. **Take time each day to pray, reflect, and read Scripture. I am asking you at First English to take a few moments every day, at 7:15 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. to pray.** Pray for those who are grieving, for the sick, for health care workers, for older persons and those with underlying conditions who are most at risk, for children and parents and young people whose lives are disrupted, and for calm and peace for yourself and all people. So we will be praying together, though not physically present with each other.

I also encourage you to reach out to one another in love, and especially to reach out to those older relatives, friends, and church members who may feel isolated. Send cards, emails, text messages, make phone calls, and use Facebook, Facetime, Skype, and other social media to stay in touch.

We are working to provide more online opportunities to worship and see and hear messages from church during this time of not gathering. They can be found on Facebook Live, accessed through our church website: [firstenglishlutheranchurch.360unite.com](https://www.firstenglishlutheranchurch.360unite.com)

The Stewardship and Finance Committees have approved a recommendation to move forward with trying to set up giving online. But until then, **we ask that you mail your offerings to the church. Your offerings are the core of faithful stewardship as well as the ongoing support of the church.** Additional gifts to the church and to other charitable organizations are especially important at this time. You can also ask Tammy at the church office to send you a form to begin automatic transfers from your bank to the church (a number of members already give in this way).

Many people are fearful and anxious as we face the uncertainty and the threats posed by this new virus. But the Lord tells us not to be afraid, and to remember that He is with us. Jesus Christ shared our human life with us. He is beside us at the lowest points in our lives. He suffers with us and with all who suffer. He died for us and for the whole world, to forgive us and re-unite us with God. He does it all out of love for us. And Jesus was raised from the dead to give us new life and hope and the assurance of eternal life with God.

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In Christ's peace,

Pastor Steve