

March 14, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus,

We are at an extremely difficult time for our nation and world. The SARS-CoV-2/Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting all sorts of ways in which we live. As the reality of this crisis and the need for action to limit exposure sets in, we recognize and anticipate further disruptions to come. Adopting as a society self-imposed restrictions, even among the young and healthy, so that those most at risk are not unintentionally harmed is needed. The MN Department of Health and the CDC have both strongly advocated for the practice of social distancing, not just for the vulnerable groups, but also for us all as a means to prevent its spread and slow its growth. **For that reason, the Board of Lay Ministry is announcing that we are temporarily suspending our worship gatherings and other activities here for the next two weeks.** We know that some may find this to be an overreaction, but we would strongly encourage you to consider what other ways you are able to limit your social interactions. Social distancing may allow for this to slow, and if so, it might not look like it was much of a big deal. If we can compare this to a blizzard where we are projected to get 2 feet of snow, but only get rain, we might look stupid for cancelling. But frankly we'd rather look stupid than encourage people to take needless risks for themselves and others.

In all of our anxiety, we do not fear. The stock market may crash, but we remain generous. Sickness may spread, but we remain faithful. Our trust in God is not dependent on circumstances. We don't claim faith only in times of blessing. We will be seeking to reach out to those who fall into higher risk categories with ways in which we will be able to bless and serve. For people in those categories, we strongly encourage understanding of what the CDC is recommending, located here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

Pastor Thompson will be recording a message for us, so that we continue to share in the Word of God together as a community. Look for a link at [www.saintstephanus.org](http://www.saintstephanus.org) or on Facebook tomorrow. As always, today and everyday, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:39).

In Jesus,  
The Board of Lay Ministry  
Pastor Thompson and Megan Hoffman, DCE  
Parish Planning Council