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March 19, 2020

Subject: Shepherding Notes

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

By now you have received an email (or mailing if we had no email for you) from your council leadership indicating our congregational response to the Coronavirus. Your rostered staff wanted to follow that up with a few shepherding notes. First and foremost you and your families are each in our prayers. As is reflected in the letter from our council leadership “we seek to balance our desire to be both responsible and faithful while staying in Christian community with one another during these unprecedented times.”

To that end, in an effort to do our part to curb the spread of this virus we are each following council guidance and limiting our contact with others, working from home and developing creative and imaginative ways to help us all stay connected. We held our first Rostered Staff Zoom meeting this afternoon. This is an online meeting tool that allows for persons to join via their computer by video conferencing or simply attend by dialing into a central number on their phone. We have set the account up in such a way that an email and password may be given to any leader who wishes to convene the groups or ministry teams they lead in this way. They will be the “St. Paul Convener” and send invites and instructions through email or text.

Pastor Jeff is still in the process of setting up our account and will be in touch with key leaders to walk them through how it works. Please note Zoom should NOT be used as a way to coordinate physical meetings or gatherings at this time, but ONLY as a way to stay connected while avoiding physical contact, again as a way of doing our part to curb the spread of this virus.

We encourage you to remain in the Word. Look for us to be sending out notifications of special times for online Bible studies, devotional group meetings and prayer. We encourage you to BE the sacrament. You don’t have to take communion to be communion and to stay in communion. Let’s share Jesus, love and serve in a new way together.

It would be our hope that our new Zoom account would be a way for groups and committees not only to continue their work and ministry together, but also a way for them to be in prayer for one another as a “shepherding group” with the committee chair / group leader seeing themselves as the lead shepherd for their “flock”.

Admittedly not every member is computer savvy so it would be important for those who are to stay in touch with those who are not via phone. During this time we would encourage every group leader, every committee chair, every worship coordinator, anyone who manages our membership “lists” or ways we group together in any way to see the folks on their lists as their “flock” and themselves as the shepherd God is calling to lead by touching base by phone, text etc. to pray and encourage.

We have been instructed by the hospital that were a family to be in a life and death situation, the family can request the physical presence of a pastor, and the hospital, upon request, would be willing to contact us. Were you to find yourself in that position the hospital can or you can contact the pastoral emergency number **803-617-1979**. We will then together discern the best and safest response to your need for all.

As you are aware, SPLC life and ministry is NOT on a shutdown. It simply moves forward at this time in a new way, in hopes that we can return soon to life together as we have known it. Some of you have inquired about funerals. We will follow guidance from our funeral home professionals, but if our space were to be used it would be used in accordance to CDC guidelines. As funerals are all celebrations of the Easter proclamation of our new life in Christ, we will be counting on you to join online with the family (who would be onsite) so that together we might proclaim the good news which holds and has the final say over all of our lives, that being “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38).

Some of you have asked about Easter Sunday specifically. Again, we are counting on you to come together as the people of SPLC for all of our ONLINE worship offerings. We may, and likely won't be able to experience Easter Sunday as in year's past. But we ask you to remember this and hold it in your hearts. Any Sunday the people of God come together they proclaim the good news of the resurrection of Christ. And when we can do that again in our physical space....oh what a Sunday it will be!

We look forward to sharing ONLINE Worship with you this Sunday at 10 a.m. Only the persons we have specifically asked to aid onsite will be on location. And, to keep them safe as well as others we will not be switching people out. It will be the same people who are all being asked to limit their contact with others, again to do our part in curbing the spread of this virus.

You can sleep through the sermon. No one will know. You can attend in your bathrobe. No one will know. But your IP address will tell us you were present. Last Sunday's online viewing report reflected 84 IP addresses. However, as several family members at that IP address viewed together, our actual online worship community was obviously larger than that. As we join together in a new way of worshipping let's see if we can increase those numbers so that when the report goes out each week it serves as a reminder that though apart we continued to worship our Lord together. And we continue to remember the cross and the one present to us every moment of our lives...the one who gives us strength to say along with St. Paul that,

“⁶it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.” 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

Walking With You In The Grip of God's Grace,

Your Rostered Staff of St. Paul,

Rev. Jeff Erbskorn, Rev. Adam Carnell, & Deacon Kathleen Cartledge