

March 18, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea: though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

How are you? Take a deep breath and read again these familiar words from Psalm 46. Verse one was Martin Luther’s inspiration for the beloved hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”. In these times of anxiety and uncertainty, disappointment and grief, we find hope in the reminder that God is our refuge and strength. Whatever trials we face, whatever losses we experience, we are not alone.

Due to the most recent recommendations from President Trump and Governor Wolf encouraging social distancing and limiting gatherings to groups smaller than ten people, **the Council has decided to close our building, including Sunday worship, until March 31.** At that time we will re-evaluate, knowing it is likely that the restrictions on meeting in person will be extended.

While we will not be gathering in person, we will still gather for worship online and by phone using the Zoom platform. An abbreviated worship service will be streamed at 9am on Sunday mornings, and you will be able to participate by audio and/or video on your computer, tablet, or smartphone, or by dialing in from your phone (note that the number to call in is considered long-distance). Further instructions for using Zoom are included in this packet. The plan is for the Zoom livestream to also be simultaneously playing on Facebook Live, so you can watch the service live or check out the recording at a later time. As the Trinity Facebook page is public, you can view it through this direct link - <https://www.facebook.com/TrinityLutheranConnellsville/> - even if you do not have a Facebook account. Pastor Kerri will plan to send out worship materials prior to each Sunday for you to follow along and participate at home, and Valerie will provide music. **Information to access the Zoom meeting will follow in another email.**

As you are able, please plan to continue to send in your offerings and financial support for Trinity so that we can continue to pay our bills. We are working on setting up online giving, and you can also have your bank set up an automatic bank draft or simply mail your offering to the church. The Council is also investigating ways to cover our expenses in the event of a shortfall, possibly through securing a line of credit “loan” from a local bank. This is necessary because all of our reserves are in the form of investments, and, with the current state of the stock market, it would not be prudent to sell stocks in order to withdraw cash at this time, though we expect the market to rebound fully once this has all passed.

While the office will not be staffed regularly, members of the Executive Committee (Alan Sandusky, Cindy Workman, Sally Stoots, and Rod Gunderson) will be checking the mail and phone messages intermittently. Pastor Kerri is available by phone (724-603-5589) or email (rev.kerri.clark@gmail.com), as are the members of the Executive Committee. We also encourage you to check in with one another by phone – perhaps commit to calling weekly the people on the same page that you are in the directory!

The nature of this coronavirus is that people are contagious even before displaying symptoms, and can spread the disease unwittingly. For this reason, everyone should plan to stay home and not interact with others in person unless it is absolutely necessary. If you are part of a particularly vulnerable population, or if you contract COVID-19 and are quarantined at home, please know that the church is here to support you. **We are happy to coordinate folks to shop for groceries or pick up prescriptions and deliver them to your porch.**

Community Ministries is coordinating delivery of school lunches to families without transportation. If you are not part of an at-risk population and are able to volunteer as a delivery driver, please sign up here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc-fMKVnBSRgFBIwdhDELLdloFBqtUfzdaRblxr9K45ZSUAWQ/viewform>

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need something, and please extend grace to yourself and to one another – we're all figuring this out together! However we gather, we know that God's Spirit is present as we worship, pray, lament, and praise.

With hope,

Pastor Kerri