

Dear

We hope and pray that you are staying safe and healthy during these unprecedented times. We know that this has not been an easy season for any of us. Physical distancing is affecting our daily lives in new and surprising ways, and we hope and pray that you are finding the connections and support that you need.

In early March, Session formed an Advisory Committee made up of members in our congregation who are also medical professionals. This Advisory Committee has continued to provide guidance and recommendations for our Session at each new juncture in decision-making related to COVID-19. On March 12th, our Session voted to suspend all in-person worship services in order to be proactive in stopping the spread of COVID-19. It is our belief that we have made as smooth a transition as possible to

Zoom and online gatherings. We have had a couple of months of a routine of Sunday Worship, Tuesday Fellowship, and Wednesday Christian Education. We have reached out to every member to offer assistance in connecting to our services through computer, phone, or landline.

We know that this new normal has been far from ideal. We are not physically together. Many of us desperately miss opportunities like choir, and we know that many of the aspects that draw you to ____ Church have been limited or cut off. We are grateful for your continued support and patience as we create new ways of being together. We are deeply grateful to know that you have been reaching out to one another, keeping each other connected, and loving your neighbors.

Thank you.

____ County has entered Phase 2 of Governor Inslee's reopening plan and Governor Inslee has given new directives for faith communities who want to open up for in-person meetings. However, in the last week, ____ County has had a significant increase in COVID-19 cases and may not be able to move to Phase 3 as soon as planned. The goal of the phases was not to avoid COVID-19 but to allow the economy to restart and to give space for the medical community to adequately respond to new cases.

With all this in mind, Session met on June 11 to discuss and discern how to proceed with plans for our communal life together in this season. These discussions were not taken lightly, but rather were filled with prayer, grief, and careful discernment.

Barring definitive scientific developments that would allow groups to gather without physical distancing and safety precautions, and being committed to worship experiences where all are welcome, Session has decided, in alignment with the Advisory Committee and fully supported by the pastors, to continue suspension of all in-person worship services through at least the end of 2020.

We share this with heavy hearts that long to be together with all of you in person. We also share this with a deep sense of responsibility for your safety and the safety of our community. Since it seems that our understanding of COVID-19 changes daily, we will continue to be flexible. However, we believe that by making this decision, we are making it clear that our priority going forward is the safety of our members and community. With this decision, our leadership can now focus on how we continue to be a community during this time instead of trying to come up with a plan to reopen under the extremely stringent guidelines that would be required to reopen safely for in-person worship (e.g. all are masked, limited numbers inside our building, 6 feet of physical distancing between participants, no singing, deep cleaning of the worship space between each gathering, etc).

What this means specifically for ____ Church:

Sunday Worship will be solely on Zoom and Facebook Live through the end of 2020.

Staff will continue to work primarily from home.

We will continue to diversify our online offerings to share and invite others to experience life with _____ Church.

We will care for and maintain connection with those in our congregation who do not have access to the internet.

Church is not closed. _____ Church will continue to meet online for worship, fellowship, and education. _____ Church has always been more than a building. We are a community committed to seeking Christ's Way and welcoming all people. We are committed to keeping our church family connected and growing while also challenging our sense of church and mission in this unprecedented time.

We recognize that receiving this news will intensify the grief so many of us are feeling in this time, and so we want to remind you that Pastor _____ and Pastor _____ are always available to speak with you on the phone or via video chat if you would like to ask questions about or simply process this decision. We would love to make space for you as you digest this news and look towards the future along with us.

Thank you for your patience, compassion, and love