

March 19, 2020

Dear members and friends at Emmaus Lutheran,

“And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.
“And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.
“And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.”
~by Kitty O’Meara (shared by a colleague)

Grace and peace to you all in this time filled with anticipation for what may happen with the dawning of each new day. My constant prayers are centered on the needs of those most vulnerable and those most in need at this time, realizing that includes some of you from among our own. Know that God is present with us in the midst of the challenges and changes we are going through along with our sisters and brothers all around the world.

Every day I seek to make the best and most responsible decisions. The Covid-19 situation is so fluid that things change from day to day. At Emmaus, we have cancelled all worship services, all church meetings, and all outside group meetings – including our AA group and the Scouts. These are cancelled through the month of March. We shall see what decisions come next.

Emmaus is operating on a mere skeleton staff and a scaled back version of our normal weekly activities and events. I am doing most of my work from my home office. Our church office is opened on a very limited basis as Robin Panko comes in to gather the mail, check email, retrieve voicemail messages, and make sure bills are being paid. Our preschool is still open but will close until further notice starting tomorrow at 6 p.m. Our food pantry is opened as usual – Tuesday from 10 a.m. to noon. However, the mode of operation is anything but usual. The food pantry is staffed by one person who prepares a bag of food for each family and sets it outside the door for them to pick up. There is no personal contact and also more limited opportunity for offering the caring ministry with these people who come to us in need.

As of right now, we are scheduled to worship again on April 4/5, resuming with our Palm Sunday worship services. That’s as of right now. The shut-down of the school system in Florida has been extended through April 15, which is after Easter. If a general shutdown is ordered for all public gatherings, we may not be able to worship together until after Easter. I cannot imagine such a thing happening, but we must comply with the voices of authority in our state and our nation. Let us all pray that we will be together to

worship and to celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead and hear again the promise of new life for ourselves at the same time.

At this time, we are:

1. working on a plan to have phone contact with our membership to determine the areas of most critical need among our members;
2. working on a plan to broadcast worship on Facebook or our church's website;
3. encouraging anyone who gets a diagnosis of the Covid-19 virus to let us know in the church office (386-775-9676) or Pastor Mark (386-682-7926);
4. encouraging members to send offerings in via mail;
5. encouraging everyone to continue social distancing practices for as long as it is recommended by the CDC, the WHO, and other state and national statements;
6. implement a practice of 'touchless peace' and not passing the offering plate;
7. encouraging everyone to stay home as much as possible to allow this virus to pass.

I will communicate with you via email with updates regarding our life together at Emmaus. Please check your email daily to stay up-to-date. Please pray for the health and safety of all God's creation.

Grace upon grace,
~Pastor Mark Winkler