

## **AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM PASTOR KRUEGER RE CORONAVIRUS REPONSE \* MARCH 17, 2020**

### **Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines, as of March 17, 2020**

On Sunday, March 15, 2020, as we gathered for Sunday worship, we gathered under the guidelines that had been set by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and affirmed for our area by the McLennan County Department of Health of holding no gatherings of more than 250 people. At that time, it was our plan to continue worship services under those guidelines. On the evening of March 15, 2020, the CDC introduced new guidelines, which again have been affirmed for our area by the McLennan County Health Department, which now read, as follows:

“CDC, in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings, recommends that for the next 8 weeks organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States.” (Source: CDC Web site)

In addition, on Monday, March 16, 2020, the President of the United States, President Trump, issued nationwide guidelines for the next 15 days that read, as follows:

“My administration is recommending that all Americans, including the young and healthy, work to engage in schooling from home when possible, avoid gathering in groups of more than 10 people, avoid discretionary travel and avoid eating and drinking in bars, restaurants, and public food courts...If everyone makes this change or these critical changes and sacrifices now, we will rally together as one nation and we will defeat this virus...With several weeks of focused action, we can turn the corner quickly—a lot of progress has been made.”

In addressing the President’s initiative, labeled, “15 Days to Slow the Spread,” White House coronavirus response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx said if Americans follow these guidelines over the next 15 days, the U.S. will see a dramatic difference in trajectory of outbreak. To view a document containing the specifics of the 15 Days guidelines, [click here](#).

With both of these edicts in mind and taking into consideration other guidelines previously issued by the CDC regarding social, susceptibility of older people to the virus (especially those with existing health conditions), avoidance or cancellation of non-essential gatherings, the Board of Directors of St. Paul Lutheran Church met on Monday evening, March 16, to discuss an appropriate response of our congregation to these directives from the CDC and the President.

After due diligence, the Board decided to take the safest course of action recommended to protect the members of our congregation and the community in which we live by taking action in accord with the aforementioned guidelines. The Board agreed that moving forward, even beyond the 15 days initiative, the best course of action would be to follow the CDC guidelines. With that decision, the following actions will be put into place immediately to do our congregation’s part in combatting the spread and preventing possible infection of the virus.

### **WORSHIP CHANGES**

**Sunday Morning Worship** - Because the worship attendance at services of St. Paul numbers over 50 per service, for eight weeks, counting from March 15, on-site public worship services will not be conducted at St. Paul Lutheran Church. We will follow the pattern already established by many large congregations like ours of providing live-streaming and archived copies of our 10:30 am Sunday morning worship service.

It is our hope and prayer that at the end of the eight week period the 50 person cap for gatherings will be lifted. If that is the case, then we would resume our regular Sunday morning onsite worship gatherings on Sunday, May 10. If that cap is lifted earlier, then we would resume earlier. We will continue to monitor and follow the CDC guidelines throughout this time to determine when we can resume our normal gatherings.

Pastor Hardaway and I will be at the church at 10:30 am on Sunday mornings to conduct the services as we normally would, utilizing the necessary minimum technical team and musicians required for producing and streaming the service. Congregation members will be able to download a copy of the order of worship from the church Web site, [www.splcwaco.com](http://www.splcwaco.com), which will include the lyrics for the hymns, in order to participate in Sunday morning worship via live-stream from their homes. A link to the orders of service will also be included in the regular Friday emails sent from the church office.

To live-stream from the Internet, simply go to the St. Paul Web site at [www.splcwaco.com](http://www.splcwaco.com) and click on the LIVESTREAM & ARCHIVES button. Then, follow the directions from there. A copy of the worship folder is available by clicking on the link provided on the home page. Live-streaming may also be done on Facebook via the church Facebook page: St Paul Lutheran Church (Waco,TX).

**Lenten Midweek Services** – The remaining Wednesday Lenten Midweek services will be discontinued immediately. The remainder of these services primarily fall in the time period of no gatherings of more than 10 people, a number which we regularly exceed. There are no plans to live-stream these services. In the place of these services, on Wednesday mornings weekly home worship guides will be made available via email and on the church Web site. These home worship guides will follow the format that was being utilized for these services with some Bible study questions for home discussion based on the Bible reading for the day taking the place of the sermon.

**Holy Week Services** - Maundy Thursday, April 9, and Good Friday, April 10, services will be live-streamed at 6:30 pm on Maundy Thursday and at 7:00 pm on Good Friday. The orders of worship will be available for download, just as they will be on Sunday mornings. Easter Sunday service will be live-streamed at 10:30 am. There will, of course, be no Sunrise Service or Pancake Breakfast on Easter morning; nor will the Children's Mini-cantata be held.

## **OTHER CHURCH GATHERINGS**

**Sunday School and Bible Studies** - At this time, Sunday School and Sunday morning Bible studies will be cancelled for the same eight week period established for Sunday morning worship according to the guidelines set by the CDC.

**Other Bible Study Groups** – For the maximum safety of our members, the other Bible study groups that normally meet as part of our ministry will also be suspended for the eight week period. This includes the Sunday evening studies, Tuesday morning Men's Bible study, Wednesday Ladies' Bible study, College Bible study, and Confirmation and Midweek classes. While some of these are less than ten and certainly less than 50 in number, it is felt that for the safety of those who attend these studies (especially those considered to be in the high risk category for virus infection), these should be suspended during this time period.

**Other Groups and Church Events** – Other groups in the church are being asked to suspend meeting during this time, as well. Other gatherings that had been planned on the calendar during this time are being cancelled. Most of these would exceed the 50 person guideline. Included in these are the Fifth Sunday Potluck dinner on March 29, the Easter Egg Hunt on April 11, and the Pancake Breakfast on April 12. Prevention and caution are guiding words for these decisions.

## **OTHER CHURCH MATTERS**

**Election of Church Officers** – The election of church officers that was scheduled to have occurred at the worship services of April 26 will be postponed to a later date. This date will be announced and publicized in the future after regular worship services have resumed. Meanwhile, the members of the Nominating Committee will continue their work to prepare a slate for that time of election.

**The Church Office** – The church office will remain open and functioning during this time. The full time staff will continue their normal working hours. If something should happen to change the normal operations of the staff, the congregation will be notified at that time.

**Offerings** – Regarding offerings and contributions for the continued ministry of St. Paul, the following options are available. One may mail offering envelopes to the church. One may also utilize the online giving option on the church Web site or utilize services offered by one's local bank. While the congregation is financially healthy at this time, the need for offerings during this time will continue as the function and operation of the church will continue, though in a different manner. I have often commended the generosity of this congregation and believe that your faithfulness in this area will continue in these unprecedented times.

## **FINALLY**

On a personal level, I have agonized over the tough, though necessary, decisions that have been made in response to combatting the COVID-19 virus. This is especially hard when we are not seeing immediately around us the devastating impact of this infection on a mass level. But, that is the point. Our country's leaders and health officials are trying to prevent the thousands of deaths that have been experienced in other countries that did not aggressively combat the virus in the manner we are being asked to do. They are trying to prevent the overcrowding of hospitals and the devastation this virus could wreak on the masses if not contained.

In speaking with healthcare workers in our area I have learned that while we may not see it, the virus is here. Many are home in our area with the symptoms. The lack of confirmed cases is in some cases because the testing kits are being saved for those who are in the high risk categories. We simply need to look to the north at Dallas or to the south at Austin and know it is real. People are sick from this virus.

The decisions listed above were not made lightly. I believe I speak for the entire Board of Directors that, especially regarding worship, nobody wanted to cancel onsite Sunday morning worship, but knew in their hearts it was the right thing to do. This is hard. Never in 33-1/2 years of ministry have I faced these kinds of decisions. In speaking with others, these kinds of measures are new to most, if not all of us, in our lifetime.

But, this is a war against a virus that has infiltrated our land. It may not be World War II. But it is a world war. I have read the stories of sacrifice many made during World War II to defeat the enemy. Some of

you may have experienced those WWII days yourself. Their sacrifices were far greater than what we are being asked to do over the coming weeks.

What I know from our history is that we as Americans do not back down from an attacker. I did live through 9/11. I know our resolve. We are under attack by a different kind of enemy and are being asked by our governing officials to sacrifice something, our gathering together for a while, to defeat this enemy among us.

As a Lutheran Christian, I have learned that we respect our governing authorities. In Luther's Small Catechism, we learned it under The Fourth Commandment. "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." In Romans 13:1 (ESV), the Apostle Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

So, at this time, we stand side by side as members of our congregation and with other citizens in our nation who are resolved to combat this virus. We stand with our governing authorities, fulfilling our Christian duty as citizens of this land. We offer hope to the world around us through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We trust God, who is our Mighty Fortress. May He bless us and grant us the resolve we need for the days and weeks ahead.

"Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.  
Christ, the royal master, leads against the foe;  
Forward into battle see His banners go.  
Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before."  
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