

Dear Members and Friends of First Lutheran,

Your Congregation Council, in consultation with your pastors have made the decision to suspend our worship services through the end of March. This includes Sunday worship, and our Wednesday evening Lenten suppers and worship through April 1. It is a decision not easily made, but one that we felt is necessary in the wake of the growing coronavirus pandemic and the number of folks in our congregation who are in a high risk category. Above all, we want to keep us all safe to the best of our ability. This past Sunday's sermon was live streamed on First's Facebook Page. We plan to continue that practice. There will also be sermons live streamed through the Southeastern Synod website, shared by members of our Synod staff.

You may have heard that the Centers for Disease control has recommended ceasing all public gatherings of more than 50 people for eight weeks. While we hope it is not necessary to cancel for that amount of time, the situation is fluid. Your Council and Pastors will continue to stay informed of the latest advice from Federal and State government agencies and keep you abreast of our latest decisions.

At this point, we know of no one in the congregation who has tested positive for the Corona virus. Several have been tested but the results have been negative. We are also aware that several of our members are traveling in Spain, which means getting home may be problematic for them. Please keep your brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer.

As I stated in last week's email blast, Pastor Brian and I stand ready to provide whatever pastoral care you need. Please call, email or text to let us know what we or the congregation in general can do as we work to help each other through this crisis. If anxiety is getting the best of you, please don't hesitate to call upon us. Please continue to take the precautions that have been outlined previously to keep yourself healthy.

We received news just a while ago, that today, March 16, will be the last evening for overnight housing through Room in the Inn because of the virus and efforts to keep it contained. Thank you to all of you who have been such an important part of this ministry to those in need.

I leave you with this prayer:

God our peace and our strength, we pray for our nation and the world as we face new uncertainties around coronavirus. Protect the most vulnerable among us, especially all who are currently sick or in isolation. Grant wisdom, patience, and clarity to health care workers, especially as their work caring for others puts them at great risk. Guide us as we consider how best to prepare and respond in our families, congregations, workplaces, and communities. Give us courage to face these days not with fear but with compassion, concern, and acts of service, trusting that you abide with us always, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

-Pastor George