



Dear Concord Family:

With the COVID-19 (“Coronavirus”) much in the news and on our minds, I want to let you know about an important decision our session took this morning. Based on the rapidly-changing news about this crisis, the best current information we have on the risks, and recommendations from our New Castle Presbytery leadership, we are suspending Sunday worship and all gatherings at Concord through the end of the month. As we approach the end of this period, session will evaluate the situation at that time to consider appropriate next steps, including possible resumption of our normal schedule. We will communicate any policy changes in the coming days, and post them on our Concord web site and Facebook page.

This does not mean we will cease to be a community of worship and fellowship. I am currently working on a way to make a video and/or audio recording of a brief worship time each Sunday that you can access through the internet. Watch for a later email with info on how to access this. We are also working on ways to continue to be in contact with Concord members currently in healthcare facilities, which have themselves begun instituting restrictions on in-person visits. I will share more on this as plans are made.

The decision to temporarily suspend gathering together was not an easy one. But it reflects our commitment to be the kind of community our Lord calls us to be: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (*John 13:35*). Which is to say, this decision is not about fear for our own individual safety but about love for those around us, especially those at high risk from this virus. As the medical experts keep telling us, those with little risk of serious symptoms from the virus *and even those who have no symptoms at the moment* (and may never develop any) can still be carriers of the virus to those around them. In other words, transmission is happening *before there are any visible signs* the virus is present. Reducing public gatherings, as we keep hearing, is one of the best ways to slow the growth of this virus. As disciples of the one who “came not to be served but to serve” (*Mark 10:45*), we are willing to disrupt our regular patterns of living for the sake of those in our congregation, our community, and our world.

In unsettling times like this, let’s remember that we serve a God who is bigger than any crisis or virus. This doesn’t mean we can be naïve or indifferent about the threat this virus presents. Nor are we to be driven primarily by fear. Under the guidance of God, we practice *precautions*, not *panic*.

Finally, I am reminded that we are living into this uncertain time at the very moment we are making our Lenten journey under the theme of *Wilderness*. It’s a theme that brings with it ideas of risk and uncertainty, and the need for patience and trust: patience with God and in each other, as well as trust in God and each other. May these days ahead find us discovering the power and presence of God in us and around us, in unexpected and wonderful ways.

The peace of Christ be with us all,

Pastor Steve

PS: As you may know, this coming Sunday was to be Youth Sunday, with the young people leading us in a service they had carefully planned and prepared. We will make sure that they have the opportunity to lead us in this service at some future time.