

March 14, 2020

Dear beloved members of Oscar-Lake and Trinity Parish,

Due to the COVID-19 virus, we will be implementing some changes to how we do worship. We are not panicking, we place our hope in Christ, alone. But we also realize that God has given us the gift of common sense, an understanding of science and most definitely a call to be good stewards of our personal health and that of our neighbors.

Therefore, we will be implementing the following practices for worship effective Sunday, March 15, 2020 until further notice:

- We will begin practicing social distancing of physical space with a distance of 6' apart per [CDC recommendations](#) at all gatherings
- Sharing of the peace will be suspended. Everyone is encouraged to greet and offer the peace to one another verbally before and after worship, but we will continue to the order of Confession immediately following the Gathering Hymn
- Preparers of the elements for Holy Communion, which will be by individual cup rather than intinction, will use hand sanitizer and wear food service gloves. As always, Julie and the Communion assistant will use plenty of hand sanitizer before distribution. Those who do not wish to receive Communion may come forward for a blessing. All blessings will be done without touch until further notice.
- Offering baskets will be set up at the back of the sanctuary. Please remember to give! In order to keep our church moving and continue to do the ministries that are integral to our church and community, we need your gifts. If you can't make it to worship, you are encouraged to mail your offering (Trinity: c/o Merida Christensen, 2303 Englund Road SW, Alexandria, MN 56308, Oscar Lake: c/o Cindy Anderson, 14044 County Rd 26 SW, Farwell, MN 56327) or utilize electronic giving if available.
- Coffee and cookies before/after worship as well as cookies and suckers during Children's time are suspended until further notice.
- ***If you show symptoms or are a member of a high-risk group for COVID-19, please stay home.*** I will make every effort to facilitate alternate ways to stay connected with your church family.
- I will suspend in-person pastoral visits for the time being. This has already been implemented in our local long-term care facilities and hospitals. Instead, visits will be done via phone or virtually via Zoom.
- If you decide to suspend your worship attendance at this time, please let us know so we can stay connected! We can schedule home visits and prayers virtually or by phone. I am also exploring the possibility of offering short worship and fellowship opportunities for all members.
- You have all demonstrated time and time again your qualities of being good neighbors. Please continue this tradition and be extra attentive to one another, particularly to our members who are in a high-risk category. Identify ways in which we can support one another. As an example, offer to pick up groceries/supplies for members who may have concerns about venturing out in public places during this time.

Regarding Wednesday Night Worship (Lenten Services, Youth Education, Confirmation) and upcoming Special Events

- Due to an inability to effectively practice social distancing, **meals will NOT be offered prior to Wednesday Lenten services.** Arrangements are being made to provide a snack to children participating in Youth Education programs.
- The March 21 Fire Victim Fundraiser has been postponed – new date TBD
- A decision regarding the April 4 Trinity Men’s French Toast Breakfast will be made at a later date

As this is uncharted territory for all of us, the Parish Council and I appreciate your patience as we navigate this together. We encourage you to contact us with suggestions. As the situation changes, we may need to make changes and adjustments to how we “do church.” As an example, if it becomes necessary, I can offer Confirmation Classes virtually.

I encourage you to continue following common sense practices that you have already put in place:

- Wash your hands frequently and for at least 20-30 seconds. Use the Lord's Prayer, “Jesus Loves Me” or another favorite hymn as your timer. Voila! You have developed a new spiritual practice besides practicing good hygiene!
- Stay away from large crowds or group in which you are unable to be at least 6 feet from others.
- Sanitize door handles, light switches, keyboards, buttons, and other switches often touched and do it frequently (at least 3 times/day). (And thank Tom and Joan for doing this at church!)
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- If you are sick, ***STAY HOME!!!!!!***
- Be good stewards of accurate information. Refer to the [CDC](#) (Center for Disease Control), [WHO](#) (World Health Organization) or [MDH](#) (Minnesota Department of Health) websites for the most current and scientifically accurate information.
- Tend to your spiritual health. Pray. Pray often and pray deeply. We still trust in a God who loves us and will never leave us. Pray for healthcare workers, pray for those who cannot afford to stay home, pray for kids who rely on school meals for their 'daily bread,' pray for people with no home to go to, pray for Oscar Lake and Trinity Parish and our members as we work together to weather this storm.
- Study—I am hoping to post short Bible Study and Spiritual Practice videos. If there is an interest, we could also schedule a “virtual Spiritual time.” Please contact me if you are interested in Bible Study/Spiritual resources, or just to talk! But I would encourage everyone to develop a routine of daily readings, prayers, and blessings. With that, I would like to share this poem that I have found very meaningful over the past few days:

Pandemic
What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.
Lynn Ungar

On behalf of the Parish Council and myself, I want to thank all of you for your patience, understanding, resilience and flexibility during this time.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Yours in Christ,

Julie

Please contact me at any time cell/text – 320-491-2304/email: jcarlson@wartburgseminary.edu or macjac@gctel.net