

March 25, 2020

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In this season of Lent and this time of pandemic, every day brings deepened challenges that require new decisions and strategies to address developing realities. What we hoped for and planned a week ago have changed at least 5 times since.

Here is the situation at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church as of this date.

The church facility and all our offices are closed through April 13. Prior to the state order restricting all gatherings, our staff had self-quarantined because of possible exposure to Covid-19 (one of our staff families is quite ill). After the state order, we extended our in-place staff quarantine to close all offices and the facility to comply with state orders and to do all we can to mitigate virus spread. The closing of the facility and offices will be reevaluated as the situation warrants.

Worship: The past two Sundays, worship was provided through live streaming on our website (Sundays at 9 am); it also is available recorded (you can find it on our website homepage). Our intent was to extend the online worship experience to include more music and singing and liturgy. Unfortunately, the escalating impact of the pandemic has undermined our plans. Our plan is to continue streaming online live worship service (and offer it recorded) even if it is more basic than we had hoped.

Bible Studies, Youth and Children's Programs: The Logos program was cancelled for the remainder of this Spring term. Lisa Turner is communicating with families and their children, and is providing resources for Christian Education at home. Seekers, LIFE and TUXIS have shifted their meetings to online (tech-driven) opportunities. Sarah Godbehere coordinates those events, gatherings, and studies. Susan Mozena is facilitating adult study groups with Zoom gatherings and phone-ins. If you want to join any of those adult groups through technology, contact Susan by email or leave her a message.

Pastoral Care: Our deacons (and other volunteers) are contacting every member of the church in the Detroit vicinity (by phone preferably, or by email if necessary) to determine their wellness, to make sure they are connected to family and friends and to the church, to assess any need they may have and how we can address it, and to let them know of our love and God's love. Special attention is being paid to any member socially isolated by infirmity or disability. This is a tremendous and necessary endeavor and I am so grateful to the deacons and their leadership for implementing this strategy (which will remain ongoing during this crisis). Anyone needing pastoral care can contact one of the pastors or use the pastoral care line on the church's telephone system. A daily or weekly phone-in and online devotion and/or prayer will be implemented soon.

Outreach and Mission: Due to the unprecedented nature of, and dislocation caused by, the pandemic, all mission activities must be reassessed for viability in the present context. That reassessment includes reexamining priorities in light of new challenges related to the pandemic, how to assemble teams to work on projects and fresh ways to do mission in an era of social distancing.

The Interim Committees: Both the History-to-Our-Story Team (HOST) and the Mission Study Team (MST) were just beginning their work when the pandemic swept through our area. Both teams' work has been suspended until we get our bearings personally and institutionally. They will be restarted as soon as possible.

Staff: The directive to staff is that if they are sick, their priority is taking care of themselves and getting well. If they are well, they are asked to work from home to the extent they are able to do so. We are exploring new avenues to accomplish and discharge our responsibilities in ways faithful to our calling and the needs of the church. In the midst of all that is going on, some staff are sick, some are caring for family members who are ill, and all are shouldering the extra burden of anxiety and our concerns for the church, our families, and one another. Please keep the staff in your prayers.

Leadership: The Session has approved the necessary steps the staff has suggested for GPMC to follow, and continues to be apprised of the situation in our congregation.

Finance: The staff have been asked to anticipate the financial consequences of wide-spread unemployment and economic dislocation for our membership and our society, and the budget of GPMC. Staff will suspend any non-essential major purchases that were planned for this programming year, and reassess the need for other spending throughout the remainder of the budget year. Financial decisions for the year will be reevaluated as warranted.

Stewardship: With worship only available online and the offering plate not being passed, a typical avenue by which we receive contributions has disappeared. For those who are able, please keep current with your pledges and gifts and offerings. Your contributions are so important at this time.

Lenten Practices: Who knew that our Lenten theme would be so relevant to our situation today? "A Whole and Holy Lent: Loving God, Loving Others, Loving Self" As I mentioned in the March Carillon article on Lent, "The shallowest spiritual practice we will ever engage is that which attempts to insure our own personal well-being/salvation without concern or thought for the well-being of others." Addressing the compelling needs of the pandemic have required us to think beyond our own convenience or preferences or safety since what we do impacts everyone around us.

Someone remarked, "I had no idea I would have to give up so much this Lent!" To that I would say, "I had no idea how much I could contribute to my community and nation and world by my simple acts of care and thoughtfulness. So much is in our (clean) hands!"

I am grateful to share with you the burdens and opportunities of ministry in this time. Please pray for all those on the frontline in the fight against this pandemic.

Grace and peace,

Mark E. Diehl, Interim Minister