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OUR CONGREGATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

March 17, 2020

Unprecedented Challenges and Opportunities

Many words of Scripture come to mind in these uncertain times. Here are just two of them:

- Isaiah 41:10 - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
- John 9:4 - "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

We are living in unprecedented times. But we are not alone. We are not abandoned. Our God is still reigning on his throne. His promise to work through all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28) is valid and certain now, as always. Let us not live in fear. And yet, there are important 4th and 5th commandment issues involved here. The 4th commandment requires us to submit to governing authorities. Those authorities have commanded us not to gather in groups of 50 or more and have recommended avoiding social contact entirely in these times. Since God's representatives in government have not forbidden us to share God's Word at all, but only gathering around the means of grace in certain settings, we must submit to their commands. The 5th commandment requires us to care for our own health and for the bodily needs of others. Doing that in these times means minimizing physical contact with those around us.

At the same time, this is an opportunity. An opportunity to show love to those around us. An opportunity to share the hope we have in the face of uncertainty. An opportunity to take more time to grow in God's Word at home. An opportunity to draw near to our God in prayer. Let's not lose sight of the truth that the devil will want to use this as an opportunity, too. An opportunity to make you feel alone and lead you to despair. An opportunity to get you disconnected from your church and God's Word. An opportunity to slow the advancement of the gospel in our community and world. United in Christ and armed with God's Word, let's not let the devil capitalize on those opportunities!

Meanwhile, God invites his people to call on him in every trouble. Join with us in praying continually, particularly for the health of our community, the safety of all the afflicted, the efforts of local, national, and international leaders, and the well-being of all those who are engaged in combating this disease. *"Our Father in heaven...your will be done!"*

Public health should be taken seriously: COVID-19 is an aggressive virus, and it affects different people in different ways. People at highest risk include those who are 60+ years old, women who are pregnant, or those who have underlying health issues. Part of the danger in this virus is that it may be present and spread for as long as 14 days before someone shows symptoms. And so, even gatherings of "healthy" people can put people at risk.

What We're Doing

Worship

We have had to make the difficult decision to suspend our regular worship services on Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays. However, we still want to be fed with God's Word together. We plan to offer the following:

- **Video-recorded devotional services** at least once/week. These will be distributed on our Riverview Lutheran Church YouTube channel and will likely also be posted on our website and Facebook page. The specific schedule for the release of these services is still to be determined. We encourage you to view these videos and to share them (what an opportunity to share your faith!).
- **Private communion by appointment** is available from our pastors at any time. We hope to be able to schedule regular small communion services in the coming weeks, but we have determined that it is not wise to do so at this time.
- We are also considering distributing **written devotions by email or mail**.
- **Additional Worship Opportunities:** Many other WELS churches and ministries publish content for viewing online or in other ways. We plan to assemble a list of such opportunities and put them on our website. We encourage you to make use of and share such content as well. Here are a few examples:
 - View Time of Grace worship broadcast on Saturday night at midnight or Sunday morning at 6:30 a.m. on NBC26, or Sunday afternoons at 3:30 p.m. on the Daystar Television Network (49.1).
 - Use WELS online devotions (<https://wels.net/serving-you/devotions/>). They include general daily devotions, as well as devotions written for specific audiences (military, women, etc.). Many of them are available in both written and podcast form.
 - View services from other congregations. This page has a list of streaming services (<https://yearbook.wels.net/streaming>), although that may change in this situation. From the WELS Yearbook page, you can also find other congregations with worship broadcasts.

Sunday School and Bible Classes

- **The following classes are suspended until further notice:**
 - Children's Sunday School classes (we will try to share resources for parents to use at home)
 - Monday afternoon bible class
 - Public School catechism class
 - Home Bible Study on March 21
- **The following classes are still planned to continue:**
 - Saturday Basic Bible Christianity class
- **The following classes are still to be determined:**
 - Sunday "A Matter of Life and Death" class – A face-to-face class will not be held, but Pastor Wagner may attempt to lead this class online in some way.
 - Sunday "Wonders of God" class – Pastor Belter will schedule remaining lessons with participants.
 - Christian Book Study on March 31 – Pastor Wagner will contact participants to determine a plan.

Shut-in Visitation

Visits to care facilities are currently prohibited, except for end-of-life situations. The pastors will be suspending such face-to-face visits and will be reaching out to our members by phone and/or mail. Shut-ins living in their homes may be visited, if they are willing to accept the risk involved.

Meetings

- **The congregational voters' meeting scheduled for March 29** needs to be held because of a requirement to approve our 2020-21 budget for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program. However, this meeting will be conducted electronically, with options to call in or join the meeting online. More details about the time, date, and means of participation will be sent out at a later date.
- **Other meetings of boards and committees** will be determined by those boards.

Offerings

Though we won't be physically gathering for worship, the Lord still commands us to support his ministry with firstfruits offerings. Your offerings are very important for our ministry to continue during this time and into the future. Please use one or more of the following to continue to support our ministry together:

- Mail your offerings to our church office or bring them in to the office at any time.
- Give electronically, using the link on our website, or access the giving site using the QR code on the right.



We understand that some of our members will experience a negative financial impact from this situation. If you are among those affected, we understand that you may not be able to give at the same rate as you did previously. Please give generously as the Lord enables you. If you are experiencing hardship at this time and need assistance, there is help available through the Apple Valley Food Pantry and other resources. Please contact our pastors for help.

Closing Encouragement

If you are sick, please keep our pastors informed, so that they can pray for you. They will do everything they can to offer spiritual encouragement and help.

If you are in need of pastoral care of any kind, please don't hesitate to contact our pastors.

Finally, continue to trust the Lord and to seek opportunities to assist those around you in your community and to share the peace and hope you have in Christ

Serving you in Christ,

Pastor Dennis Belter

Pastor Timothy Wagner