

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

145 S. Prairie Street  
Whitewater WI 53190  
262.473.2131

March 12, 2020

Dear Faithful Friends of FUMC:

We are receiving more and more questions about FUMC's response to COVID-19. Health experts are concerned because little is known about this new virus. It is now officially a pandemic, according to the World Health Organization. The speed with which the coronavirus has spread makes it even more challenging to get it under control.

As things begin to unfold, and organizations/businesses/institutions around us are cancelling and suspending events and gatherings, we, too, have to make some difficult decisions. Please pay close attention to FUMC Facebook page or website. We will also try to update via email. Because things are changing daily – sometimes hourly – please be patient and flexible with both the changes and the means of communicating.

Our concern at this time is the protection of the most vulnerable. When Jesus came into this world, he first showed us how to be reconciled to God and to each other – which involved putting the needs of others before our own impulses and desires. Those of us fortunate enough to have good health are responsible for protecting those in our congregation who are more vulnerable.

So, please stay home if you are not feeling well. Please do not come to worship, or any church activity, until you feel 100% better. Even if you're pretty sure you don't have the coronavirus, even if you have just a tickle in your throat, even if you think you just have a common cold: **stay home**. Model this behavior and encourage others to do the same. We will try to connect with you as best we can, via website, email or snail-mail.

**We WILL BE worshipping on Sunday, March 15** at 8am (chapel) and 10am (sanctuary). You may notice some changes in worship. If you wish to gather for fellowship following the worship services, observe a distance from one another. Coffee will be served, but not any food products. Look for the large bottles of hand sanitizer in fellowship hall and use them often! Please be patient, flexible, and understanding as we work through these changes.

We pride ourselves on being a welcoming church with exuberant hospitality. We cherish our greeting time and our times of physical connection. We are a caring church, and our care is often displayed in the ways we join hands and give hugs. As difficult as it will be for us, we will not shake hands, offer hugs, pass the peace, or even bump fists anymore. Please look for the large bottles of hand sanitizer in both the chapel and sanctuary and use them often.

## **Cancellations for Sunday, March 15:**

- Team Jesus Drumming will not be offering music ministry at 10am worship
- Messy Church
- Prime Time (senior high youth fellowship)

Regarding meetings and other gathering times, we will be making more concrete decisions in the days ahead. We are receiving guidance and advice from our conference leadership, the state health department, the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization.

Pastor Mary Beth Byrne, our pastor of visitation, will not be doing any home visits or care-center visits (Fairhaven, the Mulberry campus, Blackhawk, Brookdale, Our House, Alden Estates) for at least four weeks. We will assess hospital visitation as the need arises. Both Pastor Mary Beth and I are always available by phone. (Mary Beth mobile: 262.215.3123) We want to share in your joys and be available – even if it's in spirit – for your concerns.

As of now, University Free Lunch is suspended until UW-Whitewater resumes face-to-face instruction and classes. The same goes for WeCare, another university ministry program.

I take such inspiration in the seriousness and earnestness of our prayers as a community of faith. What to do now? Pray. Please pray for the healing of the nations and a quick resolution to this pandemic. Pray for the communities already impacted by this virus. Pray for the healthcare workers, including UMCOR partners, who are working overtime and putting themselves at risk to care for the rest of us. Pray for the businesses for whom cancelled events are creating devastating financial impact. Pray that the General Conference of the United Methodist Church is still able to meet in May. Pray for our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable.

Let us move forward in faith.

Blessings and Peace,

Rev. Susan Bresser  
[susanbresser@gmail.com](mailto:susanbresser@gmail.com)  
608.333.4249 (mobile)