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Dear Friends in Christ at Peace,

I find that some songs have a way of expressing the concerns and worries that are heavy on my heart. So I want to start this letter by sharing the words from verse one of the hymn "Be Still, My Soul." I pray that you find comfort too from these familiar words, as you sing them in your heart and mind.

*Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide; In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; your best, your heavenly Friend Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

God continues to order and provide for us. And we are doing our best to care for our neighbor during these difficult weeks. God will remain faithful!

We continue to receive guidance from the state and local governments, and we continue to attempt to make the best decisions to keep our congregation and greater communities safe. As I mentioned in the previous letter, please know that we make decisions, not under compulsion, but in keeping with our Christian understanding of the fifth commandment that we are to "help and support [our neighbor] in every physical need."

So, here are some additional changes that we will be implementing for the coming weeks:

1. We are cancelling our worship gatherings for the weekends of March 21/22 and March 28/29.
2. Adult Bible Class and Sunday School are also cancelled on those weekends.
3. Additionally, we are cancelling our worship gatherings for the next three Wednesdays in Lent: March 18, 25, and April 1.
4. We are cancelling our Thursday morning Bible class until further notice.
5. Adult Choir and Hand Bell Choir practices are cancelled until further notice. If you are a member of one of the choirs, our Director will be contacting you regarding resuming practices if/when the time comes.
6. We are cancelling group activities held in our building until further notice.
7. Finally, as a church staff we are reducing office hours and public contact over the next weeks. We will endeavor to monitor our voicemail and emails on a regular basis.

In our Gospel reading this past weekend, we heard how Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman

about worship. In John 4:23-24, Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

I find these words comforting because, while we will not be gathering together to worship in the sanctuary, we will continue to worship in the Holy Spirit. Additionally, as we read in Matthew 18:20, even "where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name," He is present with them.

So I encourage you: do not forget the Sabbath times of worship! Be deliberate and conscious of the opportunities to worship God in your homes. To that end, I will attempt to provide more resources for you to continue in your worship and devotion life. In the meantime, please make use of Worship Anew worship resources through their website worshipanew.org .

Friends, we continue to pray for all those who are affected, or whose loved ones are affected, by this epidemic. We continue to thank God for those who are studying this virus and attempting to guide us through this difficult time. We continue to pray for those in government and other positions of authority as they make decisions for the common good. And we pray that this pestilence passes quickly.

Here is a collect prayer, remembering that we are in this together:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, give us grace to trust You during this time of illness and distress. In mercy put an end to the epidemic that afflicts us – our world, state, and communities. Grant relief to those who suffer and comfort all who mourn. Sustain all medical personnel, first responders, and those in authority in their labors. And cause Your people always to serve You in righteousness and holiness; we pray this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

As we started with the first verse of the hymn, I want to conclude with the second verse of the hymn:

*Be still, my soul; your God will undertake To guide the future as He has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake; All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.*

And finally the words of Psalm 77:1:

"I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me."

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Jeffrey Teeple