

FIRST CHURCH AND COVID-19 AN IMPORTANT UPDATE

March 13, 2020

Dear Friends,

We are traveling through some uncharted waters in these days as we try to respond thoughtfully and carefully to the COVID-19 coronavirus. So, I am grateful for thoughtful leaders and colleagues, along with the considered counsel of scientists and physicians, who are helping us to navigate the best course.

Based on such counsel, the Session met last evening to consider some extraordinary measures to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the congregation, of the staff, and of others who either rely on the church or use our facilities. We did not make the decisions lightly, but we were united in our desire to address a larger public good. Here is our present plan (subject to change as conditions and circumstances change).

- 1) ***We are suspending Sunday morning worship until March 31.*** We are in the midst of a sacred season leading toward Holy Week and Easter, and we certainly hope to be able to gather again for worship by those holy days. However, much will depend on the course of the virus during the next weeks. Right now, the containment effort is paramount; social distancing is crucial, and we believe it is both faithful and prudent for the church to join in that effort.
- 2) ***We will be uploading a bulletin and an audio recording of an abbreviated worship service (organ music, Scripture readings, sermon, hymns, and prayers – including children’s prayer) to the church’s website each Sunday.*** You can find it on the homepage of our website in the sermon section at the foot of the page, www.fpcnyc.org. By this means, the community’s members can worship remotely, even if we cannot gather together. We will pre-record the service each week and make it available in time for church members and friends to be able to access worship as an audio podcast. We are also working toward adding, as soon as possible, a video component to our service recordings.
- 3) ***There are other steps we will be taking regarding meetings, programs, and classes, and they are addressed below.***
- 4) ***The Session’s concern, which I know you share, is for the well-being of both this congregation and for the broader community we serve.*** There is much yet unknown about this virus, and we will no doubt be reviewing all decisions regularly over the next weeks and months. James Russell Lowell once wrote that “new occasions teach new duties.” As we all seek to discern those new duties in this time, we ask you to be in

prayer for the church, for the city, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable and those who must labor in their midst.

Two final requests I would add. First, “social distancing” is essential for the community’s well-being, but it is also counter-intuitive for the body of Christ. We will be exploring ways of keeping in touch with one another, and we encourage you to be in contact with your church friends during these days of separation. Second, if you or another church member you know become ill or have other pastoral needs during this time, please let us know, as such self-reporting is crucial for the care and protection of others.

Hold fast to the One whom always holds fast to you.

Grace and peace,

Bob Dunham