



First United Methodist Church  
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*Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. – Romans 1.12*

March 17, 2020

Dear friends and family in Christ,

We are living in a truly unusual and interesting time. The news and guidelines from our President, Governor, and health officials are unprecedented in our lifetime. There is certainly a great sense of uncertainty and unease throughout our world, our nation, and our community.

I want to remind you that despite all of this, we are a people of faith, hope and love! Our faith is in the grace of God to be sufficient for our every need (2 Corinthians 12.9), our hope is in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus who goes before us in all things (Hebrews 6.19-20), and in everything we do, we act in love, even as God has poured his love into our lives and keeps stirring it up in us to do good by the work of his Spirit (Galatians 5.22).

It is clear that at this present time, the most loving and caring action we may take for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as for our neighbors in the community is to abide by the recommendation to cancel any gatherings of more than 10 people through the end of March. This means that on Sundays, March 22 and 29, we will not gather in person for Worship or Sunday School. We encourage you to stay home and care for one another during the rest of this month.

We **WILL BE PROVIDING WORSHIP** in which you may participate through live streaming on our church's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/](http://www.facebook.com/firstumcreynoldsville/)) at 10:45 am each Sunday morning, beginning this Sunday, March 22. By visiting our Facebook page during the worship time, you will be able to interact in real time utilizing the "comment" box. This will provide the opportunity for you to make prayer requests which can be included during our prayer time.

We will also be providing a link on our website ([www.fumcreynoldsville.org](http://www.fumcreynoldsville.org)), by which you may access the recording of the livestream any time after the service ends, even if you do not normally use Facebook or have a Facebook account.

Please bear in mind that while we will be able to worship together through this virtual connection, the real expenses of the church continue and so we ask that you also continue to support the church's ministry through your offerings. These may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the anytime throughout the week. If no one is in the office when you bring your offering, you may deposit it in one of the locked wooden offering boxes at the

back of the sanctuary, or you may place it in the locked white mail drop box beside the door to Leah's office.

The church building WILL continue to be open 7 days a week for any who desire to come for private prayer or to utilize the church's library. Leah will continue to maintain her normal office hours (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 8:30 am – noon and 12:30 – 3:00 pm) and I will continue to be available in the office most mornings and afternoons (Monday through Friday) for questions, conversations, consultation, and most importantly, prayer. I will be making phone calls to check on folks rather than face-to-face visits, but please know you may still call and ask me to come to you in person for an emergency or as you desire.

We will still gather for small group (10 people or less) meetings; so Sharing Group, Bible Study, and scheduled Committee meetings will continue **UNLESS ANNOUNCED OTHERWISE.**

Please, **ALWAYS USE YOUR OWN DISCRETION** as to whether or not to attend any event, group, or meeting, at any time; not just during the current period of COVID-19 precautions.

I have included with this letter a letter from our Bishop Cynthia Moore-KoiKoi which I received just this morning.

Finally, remember who you are and whose you are: you are the Beloved of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! Fear not this temporary situation, but be bold in faith, trusting the grace and love of God for you to be more than enough, more than sufficient for you in each and every moment. As the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome: ***Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, be persistent in prayer.***

By His Grace,

***Pastor Tom***



**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
PITTSBURGH EPISCOPAL AREA

**CYNTHIA MOORE-KOIKOI**  
RESIDENT BISHOP

**RENEE MIKELL**  
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

-- 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (NIV)

My siblings in Christ, these are indeed trying times. There is much about which we are uncertain. We do not know how many people in the United States have been infected by the coronavirus. We do not know when schools will reopen or businesses will return to normal. We do not even know when stores will be restocked with toilet paper or hand sanitizer. Our situation and mandates from the government are changing rapidly and will probably continue to do so for weeks, if not months, to come. This is a time of uncertainty. There are a lot of things about this virus and its impact on us that we do not yet know.

But this is what I do know. I am certain that:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. And on the third day he arose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty. From there he shall come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting!*

I remind us of this not as a Pollyannaish response to a crisis or as a denial of the very real anxiety and frustration that some are experiencing. I have heard your anxiety and your frustration over not knowing what to do or how to lead in times like these. I have heard your concern and fear about the health of your loved ones. I have heard your anguish over whether to cancel worship and church activities. I have heard your anxiety about meeting the needs of the community and meeting your budget.

I wish I could visit every church and offer you a hug and a prayer. Know that the Cabinet and I are praying for all of you! We are working to remain as connected as possible. While our human condition and current circumstances prevent us from physically being in the same place, have confidence in our spiritual connection.

Be confident that in the midst of all of our anxiety, frustration, uncertainty and fear, we have a very real, steady, faithful God who is with us. Our faith reassures us that even when we cannot trust in anything or

anyone else, we can trust in God and God's presence with us.

With that in mind, I urge all of you to follow the directions of our government and health officials. Governor Wolf has urged all nonessential businesses to close for at least the next 15 days. President Trump has urged us to cancel all gatherings of more than 10 people. I know this creates anxiety for some and skepticism for others. I recommend that we listen to our elected officials and public health experts.

Your Conference staff has been encouraged to work from home, but we are all still working on your behalf. The staff has and will continue to put together resources to help you as you make decisions about ministry in this quickly changing environment. I encourage you to check our website ([www.wpaumc.org](http://www.wpaumc.org)) and Facebook page frequently. If you don't have reliable access to the Internet, check with someone who does. I encourage clergy and laity who have reliable Internet connections to call those who do not and share updates that are posted.

I also urge you to remember those who are vulnerable and be creative as you demonstrate the solidness of Jesus and grounded-ness of those who follow Him. Brainstorm ways in which you can be the love of Christ while keeping members of your community safe and following government guidelines and mandates. The Holy Spirit is very creative. Call on that spirit! If the local school or food pantry reaches out to your church for help, help them. You might even want to be proactive and reach out to them or to your local government officials and ask how the church might help. Think about how you could make sure the children in your community are fed and kept safe.

This is our opportunity to demonstrate the steadfast love of God in the midst of the uncertainty of the coronavirus.

During John Wesley's voyage to the New World, a tremendous storm began tossing and turning the ship. The waves were so intense that Rev. Wesley was knocked over as he tried to leave his room. During the storm, people from the Moravian community were peacefully singing hymns. Their calm, faithful resolve intrigued, even puzzled, John Wesley. Their witness caused him to yearn for a closer relationship with God. After witnessing their response to the uncertainty of the storm, he set out on a journey to deepen his faith and seek greater assurance of his salvation. He kept praying, preaching, studying, serving, and doing acts of mercy until his heart was strangely warmed and he was sure of his salvation. And even after that moment when he was assured of his salvation, he continued these practices with the assurance that God would move him "from one degree of grace unto another". He kept seeking after perfection in love.

How it might please God if the people called United Methodist in Western Pennsylvania responded to the uncertainty of this pandemic with such steadfast faith that others would be intrigued and seek a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ! What if through our behavior others wanted the assurance of their salvation?

The power we will demonstrate as we weather these uncertain times is not from us, it is from God. This virus might press us, but it will not crush us. We might be perplexed by what we see on CNN or Fox, but we are not in despair. We might feel persecuted, but God has not abandoned us. Some might be struck down, but not destroyed, by symptoms of COVID-19. For by the grace of God, we are the treasures of

God in earthen vessels of clay. Throughout this season of uncertainty, let us glorify our Maker!

Here are seven daily activities to help you weather these uncertain times:

- Spend as much time reading scripture as you do watching and reading news about the virus;
- Call someone you know is alone during this time and take a few moments just to listen to them;
- Put on some praise music or hymns and have your own devotional time;
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer every time you get into your car;
- Twice a day, walk around the block, down the road, or down to the mailbox;
- Don't join in the blame game that has become so much a part of our culture;
- Offer to virtually babysit for a family that now has several children at home;

Set a time to FaceTime the children, have a video tea party, play video games with them online, or watch a movie at the same time.