



Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
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Our mission is to proclaim and demonstrate the inclusiveness of God's love to the people in the Ozarks and the needy of the world.

March 16, 2020

My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ:

As you are well-aware by now, the Center for Disease Control and World Health Organization have made the general populous of our United States aware of not only COVID-19's presence in our country but that it is a designated pandemic and that cases are increasing exponentially. Fear has taken our country by storm as people scramble to get hand sanitizer, non-perishables, toilet paper, and other such items to self-quarantine and socially distance themselves. Many schools, churches, businesses, trips, and events across the nation have been canceled or postponed. In short, these are scary times that we live in now, but we cannot let the fear of what comes next control and hinder our serving God and this community to the best of our abilities.

Therefore, both in light of these fears and in response to our call to serve our fellow humans, the Session met this morning to discuss how our church will operate until the COVID-19 virus is no longer a threat to us. The following list is a brief summation of what your Session and myself believe is the best course of action in the moment, each decision to be reevaluated at each stated Session meeting until COVID-19 is no longer a threat:

- **Sunday Morning worship:** Sunday morning worship will continue as normal because we believe it is important to maintain regular worship practices during such trying times as we now face. However, in the hopes of maintaining cleanliness and preventing the spread of the virus, everyone will wash their hands promptly upon entering the building for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap and drying with paper towels. During the Passing of the Peace, you may “elbow bump” or simply wave, but there will not be any hugging or shaking of hands allowed until further notice. Though there is not an issue with attendance numbers, we strongly feel it is best to not have gatherings of greater than 50 people. We suggest and encourage all congregants, during worship, to sit at least every-other seat and to spread out across both sides of the sanctuary. Finally, the “Friendship Pads” will not be passed around until it is deemed safe to do so again.
- **Communion:** Communion will continue to be practiced by our congregation on the grounds that, during times like this, it is important to remain united as the Body of Christ, and such practices as Communion are effective means of maintaining that unity. However, until further notice, people wishing to partake shall be invited to come down

the center aisle and will be handed the elements up front by the servers who will be wearing protective gloves. Anyone unable to come forward but wishing to partake of the elements shall have the elements brought to them by a gloved server.

- **Offering:** The offering will still be taken up on the grounds that the work of the church goes on in spite of this pandemic, and we physically cannot function without the regular contributions of our valued congregants. However, the offering plate will not be passed around to lessen the means by which the virus could possibly spread. Instead, the plates will be left at the back for people to place their offerings upon entering or leaving. You may also mail in your offerings to P O Box 3095 if you are not doing so already or use the online payment option on our church's website.
- **Sunday morning fellowship:** Sunday morning fellowship shall continue to function as normal because we feel that, while it is easy to isolate ourselves and disconnect from our friends and family during these times, it is important not to do so. It is through our supporting one another that we are able to bear these burdens and persevere. However, people wishing to stay for fellowship will be required to use hand sanitizer (if not wash your hands again) before touching food, utensils, cups, etc. Those working in the kitchen will be required to wear gloves at all times while working in the kitchen and to wash their hands after taking them off.
- **Sunday school:** Until further notice, Sunday school has been suspended. Taking into account the gathering of people before worship, worship, and fellowship, the tacking on of Sunday school after all of that time in a closed space is an unnecessary increase to the risk of spreading the virus. On top of that, cleaning the Bibles and the tables afterwards creates an unnecessary hassle.
- **Game night:** Until further notice, our monthly Game Night shall be suspended. Maintaining the cleanliness of not only the chairs and tables used, but the game pieces, cards, boxes, rule books, etc. is too great of a hassle to ask a person to take on.
- **Potluck:** Until further notice, our monthly potlucks will be suspended. The fear of contracting the virus has severely reduced the number of people interested in coming to this event, and it's a lot of work to put on if hardly anyone (if anyone) will show up.
- **Presbyterian Women:** Session has decided that we cannot decide for Presbyterian Women whether or not to continue or suspend operations. We strongly suggest, though, should Presbyterian Women decide to keep going, the meetings be held elsewhere to reduce the amount of maintenance required to keep the church grounds a germ-free environment.
- **Men's Bible Study:** Until further notice, Men's Bible Study on Wednesday mornings shall be suspended. Many in the group are classified as "high risk," and should they decide not to attend because of that risk, the number attending would be all of two/three persons, including the pastor.
- **Knit Knacker:** The Session could not make the decision for Knit Knackers as the meetings are not held on church grounds. However, those involved in the group are strongly encouraged to check with Jean Razer as to whether the group is still meeting and if so, where.
- **Quilters/other groups that use this space:** The Session strongly recommends that Quilters and other groups that use our church space for meeting cease usage of the space until further notice. These groups are composed of not just our members, and we need to look out for not just our church community, but the Holiday Island community as well. It

is therefore felt that allowing such meetings here will not only increase the risk of the virus coming in from an outside source, but that it will be an increased risk (as opposed to normal Sunday morning functions) of spreading the virus from our church to the wider community.

- **Men's Breakfast:** Until further notice, the Men's Breakfasts shall be suspended. It is our understanding that the hotel we usually meet at has suspended allowance of groups to come in and use its conference rooms. While that does open up the possibility of having the Men's Breakfasts here, that then puts unnecessary pressure on one or more persons to make the breakfast and clean up after it.
- **Choir:** The choir will continue to rehearse on Wednesday afternoons and Sunday mornings before worship. The choir is an important part of the worship experience just as much as it is an important part of the lives of the choir members. However, the choir shall not robe because it is our understanding that the robes are a surface the virus can exist on for extended periods of time.
- **Community response:** There is always much that we as a church can and should do in the community. For example, should the Meals on Wheels need more volunteers, our church could help in distributing those meals. Also, given the number of reservations, trips, entertainment, etc. that have been canceled due to the virus's spread, the members of the church could channel the money they would have used for the now-unavailable events into such charities as the Backpack program, People Helping People, ECHO, Purple Flower, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and many more.
- **Church support:** Our newly-freed funds from cancellations/postponements can also be redirected towards helping to maintaining the church's cleanliness in the purchase and donation of paper towels, soap, hand sanitizer, protective gloves, and disinfecting wipes. Also, with the increased amount of hand washing will come a higher water bill, meaning that the newly-freed funds could be put towards weekly offerings for paying operating costs.

As always, use common sense in regards to this virus, both in and out of the church.

- If you are not feeling well or you are afraid of contracting the virus, stay home. We would rather you feel well and safe than feel obligated to attend church amidst sickness or feel uncomfortable here because you do not feel safe. If you are unsure, stay home.
- Whether at home or outside, be sure to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap. If you are unsure, wash them again.
- While you are encouraged not to let fear get to you and to isolate in your homes, a certain amount of social distancing is a good idea.
- If you need to go shopping, try to go during off hours (early mornings/late evenings and not during the weekends).
- If you are exhibiting symptoms, wear a mask if you go outside and speak to a medical professional.
- If you have to cough or sneeze, use a tissue and immediately dispose of it, followed by washing of hands for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer. If a tissue is not immediately available, sneeze into the fold of your elbow or your upper sleeve, but never into your hand.
- Carry a packet of tissues and a small bottle of hand sanitizer with you in your purse, car, etc.

- Wipe down any hard surfaces that are frequently touched, including (but not limited to):
 - Tables/counters
 - Telephones/remote controls
 - Door knobs/handles
 - Bolt locks
 - Faucet knobs
 - Light switches

If we follow these rules, we can not only hinder the rate at which the virus spreads, but we will be able to possibly prevent some from ever contracting it and we will allow the healthcare system to be able to keep up with treatment of patients. That is what these steps will help do.

Please note that these changes being made are only temporary and shall be reassessed by the Session at each meeting with any future changes made being made known to the congregation as quickly as possible. That said, I, on behalf of the Session, thank you all for understanding and being flexible during this time as we try to navigate how we can best function during this time. Should you have any questions/comments/concerns, we invite you to speak either to myself or to one of the Session members that we might best serve and reassure you.

Blessings in Christ,

Rev. Bradley W. Rito.