

First Congregational

- *United Church of Christ* -



March 18, 2019

Children of God of First Congregational UCC,

These last few days and weeks have given us a profound awareness of how interconnected we all are as we have followed the spread of a new strain of coronavirus. The changes asked of us by local, state, federal, and world-wide experts have been increasingly rapid and influenced all our lives in ways we could not have anticipated. During all of this, you have all been on my heart and mind and in my prayers.

While the coronavirus is not extremely virulent, its ability to overwhelm our healthcare systems is real. This makes it a significant threat to those most susceptible to complications, which includes over 75% of our worshipping population. For this reason, the church's primary focus has been on medical and spiritual triage. This has resulted in quickly educating church leadership and equally as fast decision making.

Our church council met on Sunday afternoon, March 15, to discuss how the church can best respond and "Be The Church" in this time. Here are some of the decisions that were made at that meeting.

- In-person worship has been suspended through April 5th, with a tentative resumption of in-person worship for Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, April 9th. Worship will continue online, with more information to come.
- All building users, both in church and outside groups, must follow the state of Michigan guidelines published on March 13. This has resulted in the suspension of most upcoming events and moved all church meetings and small groups to meeting virtually, primarily using Zoom phone and video tele-conferencing. We are working with the Diaper and Personal Products Pantries to find ways to keep serving the public, but the ultimate decision is up to them.
- For all our church staff, everyone will be covered by paid sick leave, and if their workload decreases they will continue to be paid at the same level they are now. This is both to care for them, and in recognition that too many people must put their health at risk because they cannot afford to stay home when ill.
- For the immediate future, the church office will be closed to members and visitors, to encourage people to stay home. Please email or call the church office and myself as we are regularly checking messages.

- The Church will continue to be a place of reliable and non-anxious information and support. To that end, we will be exploring new ways to stay connected and care for one another and our community. This is ongoing work, and we are looking for people that have time to dedicate to making phone calls and organizing prayer groups. Please contact the office if you are interested in helping.

Since the Church Council made these decisions on Sunday, more recent directives from the state and federal government have made it likely that we will not resume worship until after Easter, though that decision has not been finalized yet. Indeed, by the time you read this letter, some of the plans laid out may already be obsolete. I invite you to regularly check the church's website, Facebook account, and your email for the most recent information. All the staff and I are responding as quickly as we can, while also continuing to take care of ourselves and our families.

While we do not yet know the solutions to all the problems and changes that face us, we all can become more aware of how we react to uncertainty, anxiety and fear. We also know that as things continue to change, we will also continue to find new ways to connect and support one another. The church is not defined by our worship time, or our building, but how we individually and collectively follow Jesus Christ, and strive to bring the common-wealth of God into the world.

I leave you with words from Paul that I have been reflecting on regularly.

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you ... For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:6-7

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Briggs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Briggs, Interim Pastor

Do I need to quarantine myself after traveling during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Many of us who are returning to beautiful Charlevoix from warm climates, pleasure cruises, adventure travel, or visiting family are probably wondering "have I been exposed to COVID-19?" It is human nature to reconnect and literally embrace friends, family, church and community groups, colleagues when returning from a trip. However, in the time of a world-wide pandemic, it is important to stop and ask: "Could I be infectious to others?" Why is this important? COVID-19 is 10-30 times more deadly than the seasonal flu depending on your age and immune status. Everyone above age 60 is in the highest risk group.

Quarantine vs. Isolation: Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick." Quarantine "separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick." Certainly, if you feel that you were directly exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and now have symptoms (sore throat, fever, dry cough, shortness of breath), you should call your health care provider and, with their advice, get tested. You will likely be advised to **self-isolate** and be under medical surveillance and management. If you have the disease and are infectious, isolation is absolutely necessary to avoid infecting others.

Most returning travelers fall under the question of **should I self-quarantine?** The recent *Annals of Internal Medicine* reports a study showing the incubation period for COVID-19. Most people developed symptoms in 6 days of becoming infected, 98% in 12 days. So, two weeks is the recommended minimum time for self-quarantine from time of exposure to see if you develop symptoms.

Who should self-quarantine? This is a hard question to answer, because the answers keep changing. Definitions of risky crowd sizes keep changing, from 250, 100, 50, to no more than 10. The original recommendations were to self-quarantine for travelers returning from major outbreak areas such as China, Southeast Asia, and Iran. Now the recommendations include the UK, and EU countries (as of March 15). But what about returning from Washington State or NYC, or a "large" convention? What about travelers who have been in "large" crowds?

The short answer is "Behave like you already have it!" It is worth taking precautions since the disease is rapidly spreading and wide testing is not yet available. Again, if you feel that you have been exposed directly by someone diagnosed with COVID-19, you should definitely self-quarantine. If you are not sure if you've been exposed and feel fine, you should still consider imposing self-quarantine, because you could have it and be contagious without symptoms. "Do unto others as I would have them do unto me." See this CDC video to better understand how self-quarantining protects others: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSQztKXR6k0

What does self-quarantine involve? Stay mostly at home. Work from home, if possible. Avoid in person group gatherings. Use remote conferencing for meetings. Maintain social distancing (six feet from others), no handshaking, hugging, kissing, etc. We recommend heel tapping, not elbow bumping. Good hygiene with hand washing with soap (see Alex Welch in NYT on "Why Soap Works" 3/13/20) or use backup hand sanitizer, and cleaning contact surfaces regularly with detergents or sanitizers. Sneezing and coughing into your elbow or disposable tissue. Wash clothes frequently. Minimize worry, anxiety, and depression by eating well, sleeping well, and exercise regularly. Read a good book, listen to, play, or sing your favorite music, call a family member or friend, and indulge in meditation or contemplative prayer. Take your dog for a walk. Of course, pet your dog or pet!

Welcome back! Wishing all good health and well-being. Peace be with you, Bill Wadland, MD, MS (public health), and Betty Wadland, RN (Certified Nurse Anesthetist).

We are happy to take questions. Please feel free to contact us at wadland@msu.edu or bettyjeanwadland@gmail.com. Our phone numbers are: 517-862-6505 (Bill) or 517-410-9922 (Betty).