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PASTOR

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SUMMER HILL

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Dear Fellow members in Christ,

With the spread of the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) around the world, we certainly have been thrown into anxious and changing times, especially as we hear of cases closer to home and events and schools cancelled. It's easy to allow our anxiety of the unknown to take over. I find myself remembering one of my favorite Psalm verses -- Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God." It's like the pause that the stock market has had to take a number of times this week. I take a breath, give up to God what I cannot control, and act on that which I can. Needless to say, I find myself having to do this often.

What we can do is wash our hands for 20 seconds several times a day. Reporters tell us to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. I find it more reassuring to pray the Lord's Prayer, which also provides an appropriate amount of time. Yesterday I saw a suggestion on Facebook to sing the Doxology: "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow." Using either one of these suggestions, gives me not only clean hands but a moment when I can let go of the anxiety and be filled with the calm and reassurance of God's presence. Please follow the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control recommendations of when and how often you should be washing your hands and other guidelines to protect ourselves.

As of this day, our worship service numbers do not fall into the Governor's recommendation to cancel events, but I have asked the Technology Committee to explore what we might provide by live streaming or other virtual options if we must cancel services for an extended time. That said, if you do not feel well, please stay home. If you would like to be in prayer with us at the worship time, we can email you the bulletin so that you may use it as a devotion at the same time we are worshipping.

As a community worshipping together, we have made the following changes:

1. Worship – We encourage people to gather together in worship, if you are feeling well. In this time of social distancing, please know we will understand if you desire to have a pew or two separating you from another row.
2. Passing of the Peace – Since last Fall, we have printed the option to fold your hands in prayer, and offer a slight bow with the words, "The Peace of the Lord be with you." If you have not adopted this practice up to this point, we highly encourage you to do so now.
3. Offering -We have stopped passing the offering plates and encourage you to leave your offering either in the boxes on either side of the door going into the sanctuary or in the offering plate inside the

sanctuary door. Hand sanitizer is on the stand with the offering plate. Please note we do provide for electronic giving by QR code found on your bulletin or by going to the website.

4. Holy Communion – Distribution of Holy Communion will be only at the altar by individual glasses, receiving the wine from the pouring chalice. Intinction will not be used at this time of public health concern. I have always cleaned my hands before distributing the elements, but I, along with communion assistant, will wash our hands and use hand sanitizer out of an abundance of caution. All communion ware will be washed in hot water and sanitized appropriately. If you are hesitant about receiving either the bread or the wine, know that as Lutherans we believe that Christ is fully present in either element.

5. Cleaning – Over the last few weeks, our sexton Eva Waldman has done a thorough job of cleaning the church, especially those areas that are frequently touched by others. She will continue to do so. We will also provide hand sanitizer for your use. Our water fountains will be shut down for the time we are using heightened restrictions.

6. Easter Home Communions – During the Lenten season, I visit our homebound members bringing them Holy Communion for the Easter season. With local nursing homes closing to visitors and the knowledge that it is this group of people we must especially protect, I am suspending all visits, unless requested by the family, until we are through this pandemic. This is done with the approval of our Council President, Jerry Heffleger and the Mutual Ministry Committee. I do this for 2 reasons. One out of an utmost abundance of caution. Two, I will be traveling to Massachusetts for my son's cancer surgery and know that I will be traveling to areas that have had reported cases of coronavirus, whereas today I am unaware of coronavirus cases in Schuylkill County. Please feel free to call at any time.

In her address, echoing the words of Martin Luther in the 1527 plague, The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, said, "Respect the disease. Do not take unnecessary risks. Provide for the physical needs of the neighbor. Care for one another, especially the most vulnerable." I commend those words to you.

I began this letter by remembering a favorite psalm verse, Psalm 46:10. I close with the first verse of that same psalm. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalm 46:1

Let us do what we can to keep our family and community safe and healthy. Remember whether we gather together or whether we are apart, we are all one body in Christ. Any questions or concerns, please contact me.

Serving in the name of Christ,



The Rev. Kathleen A. Ash-Flashner
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