

Dear Grace UMC – Alamogordo & Tularosa friends and family,

A few days ago we committed to taking wise, caring, and compassionate action when it comes to the way we will continue in ministry amidst the growing COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. We also committed to continually evaluate the situation and make adjustments accordingly. After much prayer, consultation with other clergy, and evaluating the statements and positions of government health officials the decision has been made to cancel all church activities at both our Alamogordo and Tularosa campuses, including Sunday morning worship gatherings in our sanctuaries, for the next two weeks (March 15 – March 28). As we look to how we can both lovingly and compassionately care for our congregation and our entire Otero County community, I believe this is the prudent action that God is calling us to.

So, for this Sunday (March 15) and next (March 22) we will be offering an online worship experience using Facebook LIVE at 10 AM. The great news about Facebook LIVE is that anyone can watch the video, even if you don't have a Facebook account. A little before 10 AM just go to <https://www.facebook.com/graceumcalamogordo> and keep an eye out for the live video feed that will pop up. Again, you should be able to watch my LIVE sermon from that link without a Facebook account. You may be asked a few times to join Facebook but just hit the 'not now' and you'll be able to continue watching. If, for some reason, you don't see a live video feed, just refresh your browser a few times, and keep your eye out. I promise, it will be there. Along with my sermon, I will also be leading us through the attached *Worship At Home* guide. I hope, even though we will be apart from each other, that we will each have a worshipful experience as we do so in spirit.

All other church events and group gatherings (Sunday school classes, music groups, UMW, community groups, etc.) are officially cancelled for the March 15-28 timeline. Early in the week on March 23 or 24, keep an eye out for more communication from us on if we are going to be able to get back to our normal operating schedule starting on Sunday the 29. This is our goal, and we're hoping and praying we can do that, but we will only do so if we are confident we can keep our congregation safe and that we won't be contributing to any community spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Staff will continue to work throughout these two weeks. However, to control traffic in and out of our building, and to ensure that we're able to get our facilities as clean as possible, all doors into the building will be locked. We're asking everyone to stay away from the facilities unless you have contacted a staff person first and they have agreed to let you in. We cannot encourage this enough: *please help us do our best to mitigate this pandemic by practicing good social distancing in your own life, which includes refraining from coming onto church property as much as possible.*

To continue to care for and share compassion with our community we will continue to offer both our food pantries in Alamogordo and Tularosa, and also our Shared Table Saturday meal. However, extra precautions will be made, such as moving to a curb-side grab-and-go model so that we aren't gathering large groups of people inside our buildings.

I want to personally thank you for your patience with me and with our whole church as we've sought the most loving and compassionate steps forward as we find ourselves in this unknown territory as a church, community, nation, and world. Please keep your church family and your community in your prayers, and don't hesitate to reach out to me personally at kelly.mccuaig@gmail.com during this time if you're needing prayer, care, or just a little conversation. We may have to come up with creative ways to be in fellowship with each other during these next couple of weeks, but I'm confident we can do it!

In this time of uncertainty, let me close by pointing us back to where God has led us, and continues to lead us, during this season of Lent as we head to the cross with Christ: never forget God's call on your life to *imitate* Jesus Christ! Imagine how afraid, anxious Christ must have felt that last week of his life before the cross. We see in the garden Christ calling out to God, asking to be saved from the cross, and literally sweating drops of blood. Your God, your Lord, your Jesus knows anxiety, he knows fear, he knows what it feels like to face the unknown, yet he walked through it all anyway with the faith and trust that *best of all... His Father was with Him!* So too is our God with us! So in this time of heightened anxieties, find someone to pray for, and pray for them. Find someone to care for, and care for them. Find someone to share hope and light and life and love with, and share it with them. *Be Jesus* to someone and be the hope that this whole world so desperately needs.

Your Pastor,
Rev. Kelly McCuaig

