

Hey folks!

The COVID response team met again this week to review our safety practices. Our goal, as always, is to maintain the health and progress of our congregation during this pandemic. We are consistently reviewing public health data and spending time in prayer so that we can make faithful, informed decisions regarding how our community practices its faith. After our discussion, we are making a few adjustments to our safety practices.

All of our online ministry will continue, and worship will continue to be online only for at least a little while longer. We'll re-evaluate at the end of February. I wish I could promise that we'll be gathering for worship in-person again at a certain date, there's just no way to know for sure when it will be safe to do so. We are pursuing the goal of resuming in-person worship without undue haste and without undue delay.

This also means that our Ash Wednesday service will be online-only this year. It will be at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, February 17th. Although our services are often available on-demand after their initial stream, I want to encourage all of us to make a special effort to watch it together. Even though it's not safe to gather in one place, we can still gather at one time. It will be a fairly traditional format with very familiar hymns. We will also impose ashes as part of this service. We will do this in a similar way to how we do communion each month. We encourage you to gather some ashes from your fireplace, wood stove, or terribly overcooked supper, and to share those within your own household. If you don't have access to a fireplace and don't want to burn your dinner, we will have Ziploc baggies of ashes available at the church office.

We've seen evidence in our congregation of what is known as "Zoom Fatigue." It takes more energy to be spiritually present in a video-conference than a physical gathering, and as more folks are having to do Zoom gatherings for work and for school, people are just too exhausted to take on another meeting. Although attendance at our online worship remains encouraging, participation in Zoom-based meetings has been declining, especially since Christmas. The COVID response team also knows that we are starving for some time with one another. We are, after all, a family of faith, and we miss each other.

Therefore, we're going to allow SMALL groups of our congregation to begin to gather in some of our larger spaces, absolutely no more than ten at a time. We also require masks and distancing for these meetings. If your Sunday School class, Women's Circle, Committee, or Lenten Small Group is interested in taking advantage of this opportunity, have the leader of that group contact the church office to reserve a time and place. If you haven't yet signed up for a Lenten Small Group, I encourage you to do so, it promises to be an interesting series.

Thank you for your continued patience and diligence, and your prayers for all of us who have been affected either directly or indirectly by this pandemic. We're all in this together, and we'll all get through it together with God's help.

Your Brother in Christ,

Rev. Joseph W. Taber, IV
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