

# First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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Greetings:

I want to thank everyone for their patience, understanding, and kindness during this difficult time. It's been incredible to see the community stand "together" in this season, despite limitations. Church Council has further deliberated concerning COVID-19 amid national and local updates, trying to determine the best course of action going forward. At this time, we believe it to be for the benefit of everyone's health to extend the cancellation of church services and events through the month of April until May 1.

This was an incredibly difficult decision to make, especially seeing as such action would place Holy Week services to a virtual-only option. However, Council is listening to the voices of health professionals and fellow faith communities in seeking to protect at-risk populations and further combat exposure to COVID-19. As we have already experienced, the Church is "more" than any building or activity – *it is the people*. And for the sake of people, God's Image-bearers, we want to do all we can to protect and save lives.

Worship will continue through the livestream on Sunday mornings at 10:30. A direct link to the video will be sent out via email and text each week as well as posted on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FCCStJoseph/>. You may also view the service as usual on the church website. If you don't watch live, you can always watch it later at any time!

I will continue sending out a devotional series to provide reflection for "at home" discipleship. Some Holy Week alternatives are being prepared that follow the rules of social distancing while allowing "at-home" participation in our most sacred season [stay tuned]. If you need anything, please ask! You can reach me at the church office M-Th (9-5) or by cell/email. All the church staff are praying and working, albeit in new and different ways, to make sure FCC is ministry-capable, whenever we return to normalcy.

This closure may be reduced if health concerns lessen and state and federal restrictions are lifted. Please keep checking your emails, the church website, and the Facebook page for further updates. If you'd like text updates, please text the number 81010 with the message: @fccstj

Continue to follow guidelines and information from the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>). Look out for your neighbors – strive to fulfill the Law of Love (Romans 13:8-13). We can and will make it through this. "Be" the Church, my friends. You are not alone.

Grace and peace,

- Rev. Jeffrey Hubers & FCC Church Council

## *A Prayer in the Loss of Normalcy*

*Below is a prayer for us to share as we lament the loss of “normalcy” in this season of social distancing and cancellation. It’s important to recognize these feelings of loss. But as we approach the Easter season together, we remember that loss does not have the last word. What was once the greatest loss in the eyes of the disciples was turned on its head to become their greatest hope and victory. Through the Cross, we find Resurrection.*

Gracious God,

In this season of global pandemic – at a time when businesses shut their doors, schools send their students home, and everyone wrestles daily with the uncertainty of it all – we come to You, our Creator and Redeemer.

We come to You, O God, because You made us for Yourself. You needed no partner, no family, no object of Your attention – You were entirely complete in Your existence. Yet, out of desire, out of self-giving Love, You created “life” – You created *us*. Help us to remember and hold to our identity as creations of Your Love.

At this moment in time, as we struggle with the “new” normal, and deal with the daily reality of COVID-19, we pray that You would give us sight to see Your hand in our midst. Help us to see the world not through the lenses of despair and negativity, but through Holy Possibility. As we recognize our innate value as Your Image-bearers, may we see that same beauty in each and every person. Help us to live in such a way that we uphold the sacred connectivity of human life, that becomes even more valuable in such a time as this.

While physical distance must be maintained, normal routines disrupted, relationships and work transformed, help us not to be spiritually despondent. Give us creativity and boldness to “reach out” to one another and encourage, inspire, comfort, and care. Even as our attention is centered on the small circle allowed us, may we not forget those who are struggling without jobs, without food – those who must risk their health to preserve our own. Keep our prayers with those who are fighting this virus, and those who suffer from it.

Though nothing about this time feels “normal” – we pray that our faith does not falter. We pray that our love does not run cold. We pray that though the “cross” of this pandemic seems heavy and frightful, remind us we belong to the One who passed through such darkness to bring everlasting Light to all the world. Good Friday may reign for a day, but Easter is eternal.

To You, we pray and honor, O LORD,

Amen.