

First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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Greetings:

“How long, O LORD” (Psalm 13:1) – this is our cry as we continue to endure disruption from COVID-19. We all long for normalcy and routine, for physical connections without fear of infection or spreading unknowingly this virus. When may we commence with activities *without* restrictions – when will this all be *over*?

With no clear answer, the best we can do is continue to listen to health experts and respect state and federal guidelines to prevent widespread infection, particularly for the most vulnerable. Church Council has decided that virtual worship will continue through June and July. Tune in Sundays at 10:30 a.m. either through the direct links via email or Facebook page, or you can always watch service videos later on our website.

Even though Sunday worship is currently limited to online-only, small groups may consider meeting outdoors (depending on state restrictions), maintaining physical distance and wearing masks. As limitations lift, FCC will also be offering some outdoor worship experiences, again doing what can be done to maintain safe distances and preventative measures. Our discipleship is not “on hold” – *you are the Church*. We continue to ask for your patience and support as we redesign and reimagine our “new normal.”

FCC now uses Zoom (video conferencing website) and can create virtual meetings for any boards, committees, study groups, etc. that would like to take advantage of the social experience. If you want to take advantage of meeting virtually with your group, just contact Pastor Jeffrey. We also have several individuals able to help those who would like to learn how to use this technology. Church boards, Youth Group, and Pastor Jeffrey’s class have already benefited from this “social-distancing-approved” method.

In the coming month, FCC will be hosting some virtual meetings for the whole congregation (stay-tuned). Church leadership is creating a “re-opening” team, and the virtual meetings will provide space for feedback. Despite our physical limitations, the Church is *working*: Our [CROP Walk](#) team successfully raised over \$2,000 and our support of the [Southwest Michigan Cares Fund](#) helps provide for basic needs in our area. Service opportunities persist with the [Soup Kitchen](#) and the [United Way](#).

We want to gather, and we will do so with time, but our unity is not bound by our physical circumstances – our unity is through the Holy Spirit. Let’s live into those [unbreakable bonds](#) and “bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). This season is stretching us all – I feel your desperation and desire for physical communion. Believe me, I long for that, too. Perhaps now more than ever, we may grasp the *cruciform* shape of discipleship: that in “giving up” for others we experience “true life” (Mark 8:34-37).

Stay in touch, ask questions, share updates, care for yourselves and one another. If you need something, *ask* – if you need to talk, or a “window” visit – please let us know. Use email, Facebook, phone calls, letters – you can also receive text updates by texting the number **81010** with the message **@fccstj** to be added to the list. Wherever you are, you are *not* alone. God is with you, and FCC is committed to maintaining connection.

Grace and peace,
Rev. Jeffrey Hubers & FCC Church Council

“HOW LONG?”

Consider joining in this adaptation of Psalm 13, as we lament the limitation of our physical gathering, but nonetheless, rejoice in the LORD’s abiding strength and faithfulness.

How long, O LORD – will we be separated by this unseen enemy?

How long will fear and disruption, anxiety and distrust plague our world?

How long must we fast from being together “in person” or fear the outstretched hand and the physical embrace of our neighbors?

We weep, LORD, for this season – we lament the disappearance of events like graduations, communal celebrations, concerts and travel.

We grieve over lives lost, jobs destroyed, plans vanished – we shed our tears for the isolation and emotional toil this season may have brought.

So, we cry out to You, O God – the One who stands above this world, and yet, at the same time, is as close to us as our own hearts. We pray to You, our Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer, trusting in the greatness of Your love to keep us steady. Remind us that though the earth shakes, Your commitment to us is immovable – Your faithfulness extends beyond our comprehension.

Even now, Your Presence is made known in the kindness of strangers – the gift of groceries on the front step, a thoughtful note in the mail, an unexpected text or phone call. Your love is revealed in the resilience of the Church, Your Body, in our daily endeavors to proclaim Your Kingdom through grace and charity, mercy and friendship. Behind every mask is the face of Your child, sacrificing for the good of their sisters and brothers.

Help us, God, because every one of us is stretched to our limits. Empower us by Your Spirit to continue to do what we must so that life is preserved, and the most vulnerable among us are protected. Grant us patience to wait, humility to listen, peace to share, strength to give, and grace to journey together, forever united in You.

In Your steadfast love we pray, O LORD our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.