

First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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Greetings:

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). We have reached a critical point in our county and state that the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has called for a three-week “pause” to indoor gatherings in order to stem the staggering growth of COVID cases. Church Council has decided to follow their wisdom and make the difficult “sacrifice” of our in-person worship, returning to a virtual-only option over the next three weeks. This does not come easy, but love for one another demands putting neighbor *before* comfort. What FCC’s three-week “pause” looks like for general activity:

- Sunday worship will be virtual-only the next three Sunday’s (Nov. 22, 29, & Dec. 6).
- The Nominating Meeting will be handled as a virtual meeting.
- All church groups are encouraged to use virtual means of meeting.
- The building will remain open during office hours (Mon-Thurs, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.) to drop off missions’ items and/or use sanctuary for contemplation or consult Minister or office staff.
- During this time, the Re-Opening Committee will monitor the county virus numbers and determine plans for the remainder of December.

This is *not* a closure, but a *re-positioning*, to aid our healthcare workers and limit exposure. Even with our safety protocols, we believe we’re dishonoring those who are laying down *their* lives to care for all those struck by the virus. We still have opportunities for connection and service:

- Sign-up to provide a Christmas gift to foster children.
- Donation bin for winter clothes collection located in church entryway until December 14.
- Contact Pastor Jeffrey to get your group together for a Zoom (online) meeting.
- Stop by the sanctuary during office hours and pray, enjoy the stillness, remember Whose you are.
- Stay in touch, 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 **@fcstj** to be added to the list. Wherever you are, *God* is with you, and FCC is committed to maintaining connection and community. We will get through this, by the power of the One who gave His life for us all.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Jeffrey Hubers & FCC Church Council

A “Different” Advent Prayer

Please consider joining in this prayer under the theme of Advent, as this re-positioning places our community in a different sort of Advent season:

Gracious God,

As You once long ago entered humanity, we wait again for Your entrance into this world with the full weight of Your Kingdom. We wait, like the prophets of old, for the Day of the LORD when all wrongs are made right, all wounds healed, and all brokenness is made new. Yet just as You came among us in weakness and dependence, You remind us that Your Kingdom does not look like anything else in this world.

You chose shepherds and peasants to be Your family – You chose a cave over a castle. You dwelt with the lowly and broken, in order that all may know there is room for everyone in the heart of God. Advent reminds us that the kings of the earth search in vain for the “King of the Jews,” but we are those who need not keep looking, for You have made our hearts Your home. You have made our discipleship Your throne of choice.

As we deal with this virus’ continued disruption, with its discomfort and death, we look to that Word of God that took on our flesh. The Eternal and Everlasting took on our temporary and our temptations. The LORD of All took on flesh, blood, sweat and tears. God took on immune systems and pre-existing conditions, stress and anxiety, cold weather and sleepless nights. God took all that we are, said “yes,” and did not stop until this world’s “no” sought to end such a selfless life. Yet the world’s “no” can never silence God’s eternal “yes.”

As people of Resurrection, we pray for hope renewed this Advent season. We pray for resilience and patience, compassion and grace. Though our gatherings look different, our traditions vary, our routines upended, we know that the Reason for the Season is You, and not us. Christ is Christmas, not the gifts or ribbon, not the feasts or the festivals. And Christ is with us – Emmanuel. No matter our limitations, no matter our distance, God is with us.

So, we can give thanks, even while we pray for transformation. We rejoice, even while our voices still long to sing. We celebrate, even when our celebrations remain virtual. Because You, not this virus, not our expectations or sense of normalcy, are King. You alone are LORD, and we give thanks that Christ is on the throne.

Amen.