

March 15, 2020

Dear Emmanuel Friends:

Good Day! As we say in opening Morning Prayer: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” – Philippians 1:2.

“This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” – Psalm 118:24.

These verses and others come to mind as this beautiful March day unfolds. I hope each of you is well, coping with the changes that this time has wrought with the knowledge that God is great, that He loves each one of us, and wants the best for his beloved people. I believe this with all of my being.

Let us also give thanks for one another, how much people at Emmanuel care about and support their fellow parishioners and community members. May we live this truth in the coming weeks and months.

I went to Emmanuel this morning about 9 a.m. and no one showed up. That is a good thing, meaning we got the message out that today’s church service is cancelled as well as the one on Sunday, March 22. Communication and checking up on each other and our neighbors will be essential in the days ahead.

Due to the coronavirus situation, we will refrain from meeting – for how long we do not yet know. I have given permission for AA to hold their sessions and asked them to take the necessary health precautions. Our other small groups should refrain from meeting for at least the next two weeks. We will re-evaluate the situation the last week of March. Please feel free to enter the building to conduct business as needed. But we should all take care to wash our hands and sanitize tables and other surfaces.

Even though we are not gathering for service, we are still the body of Christ and need to do the work of the church. As I see it, we will seek to find alternative ways to worship and connect with one another. We must care for ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually. And we need to check up on each other – particularly the elderly and anyone who may feel alone or vulnerable. Perhaps we can arrange a phone list of people to call – just to check in with and let them know we care.

For worship we are exploring online services that the diocese may suggest but also other churches and resources. More on that in later messages.

Also, remember that the Book of Common Prayer offers numerous services and opportunities to worship individually or with family at home. Look at The Daily Office in the Table of Contents to find Morning Prayer and a variety of other services throughout the day. If you don’t have a Prayer Book, these services can be accessed online. Read the Psalms and the Book of Proverbs for inspiration. Our Daily Bread, Forward Day by Day, and other devotionals are wonderful resources as well.

Perhaps call a friend and share a devotional or do a service together by phone. During the wonderful Lenten study conducted by Cathy Peyton we shared some of our favorite Bible verses. Why not continue to do so with friends? Let’s discuss what the Lord is doing in our lives through His Word. Another idea is to meditate on the Episcopal Church readings for Sunday or another day.

We should pray often, by ourselves but also with a friend by phone. My mother has an embroidered saying posted in her home: “Life is Fragile. Handle with Prayer.” How true and appropriate for this time.

Do you need to talk to a priest? Call me and I will arrange for you to speak with Father Jerry Wichelns. Any concerns or needs, please let me know. I am ready to help or find help.

The following is a list of Mental Health Suggestions for Times of Isolation suggested by Shirley McFadden, a licensed mental health counselor:

1. Take time daily for prayers, centering prayer, devotions, Bible reading.
2. Draft a schedule for your days.
3. Get outside several times a day.
4. Stay in touch with your people – by phone, email, video chat, text.
5. Use the time to do some home projects you haven't had time to do.
6. Keep a gratitude journal: write down 3-5 things that you are grateful for. Try to not repeat entries. For example, today my entries are: healthcare workers, a sunrise walk on our land, my exuberant yellow lab, our church family, the deep, deep love of Jesus.
7. Find a way to help other people – by reaching out, by donating food or money, by praying.
8. Give yourself a break from the news cycle periodically when you start to feel overwhelmed.
9. Find an online church service you can participate in. The Diocese of Central New York has several options. Luke McFadden's Christian Neighbors Church has services on YouTube.
10. Ask for help if you need it.
11. Put the brakes on when you find yourself slipping into negative thoughts. These are not helpful nor are they true. The reality of our common life right now is stark and grim but we are not called to be people of fear. We are called to hope and we have good reason to do that.

Our parish motto is "Loving God, Serving People – Serving God, Loving People." Let's look for ways to help people with food needs, such as through the Backpack Program and the Rohde Center. Let's be aware of our neighbor's needs.

Some final thoughts: "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." – Psalm 55:22.

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." – Deuteronomy 31:8.

"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." – Ephesians 6:10.

Let's be in touch. Let's be there for others. Let's share ideas and information. Let's trust in the Lord.

May God richly bless you, make his face to shine upon you, and grant you peace even in the tough times.

Yours in Christ,
John McFadden,
Emmanuel Warden