

Dear beloved community,

I want to speak directly to you as your pastor.

We are living in an unprecedented time and anxieties are running high. The COVID-19 outbreak has many of us on edge and uncertain about what information to trust, and how to be responsible without being alarmist. In times like these, we need our spiritual community more than ever. Church is a place to find healing and solace, a place to gather and a place to be called to just and compassionate action.

One of the things that makes CCSM so special is all the ways that we care for each other and that we care for the broader community. It is in that spirit that I am informing you that this Sunday we will NOT gather together, but we will have a service that is broadcast live on Facebook. I have not come to this lightly—in fact in ALL my years of ministry I have never cancelled a service—but have arrived at this difficult decision by being in conversation with our CCSM moderator and with staff, by dialoguing with county health officials and clergy colleagues, and by trusting the spirit's guidance in thought and prayer over this.

I know how much we need each other. In fact, one of the hidden blessings in all of this is the reminder of how important it is that we gather together in person. When we are not able to do that, something central to our humanity, and to our faith, is missing. However, it is because we love and care for each other that we are called to be responsible for each other's care and well-being. Our CCSM sanctuary is a safe place, and we want to ensure that it is safe. We do not want to be a place where anyone is exposed to the virus. We are taking every precaution, not because we are afraid, but because we want to protect those who are vulnerable.

So, to clarify again, **both in-person Sunday and Wednesday services are cancelled.** The Sunday service will be broadcast online at our regular time at 10:30 a.m. on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/CCSM.UCC/> In addition, please look for a video message from me on Wednesday, and that will give you a practice run for tuning in on Sunday morning. I will send a reminder on Saturday evening.

For now, we will be suspending all in person pastoral care visits. We want to be in close touch with you, so please call or email us and we will respond promptly.

Here is an excerpt from San Mateo County Health Office:

Our lives will be significantly disrupted by the measures needed to respond to a global pandemic. A pandemic is a global occurrence of an infectious disease. A pandemic is a disaster with unique characteristics. The two most important differences between a pandemic and other disasters are that the whole world is going through this disaster at the same time, and people may become fearful of other people. The current COVID-19 outbreak clearly has the potential to turn into a severe pandemic.

County Health continues to work with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and our state and local partners to manage testing and monitoring

*of persons who have been exposed to COVID-19. **But our focus is rapidly changing from a containment strategy (identifying cases and contacts) to one of community mitigation—taking steps to lessen the broad impact of the disease.** County Health and our public and private partners are taking steps to increase our ability to respond and are planning for a sustained response to COVID-19.*

*I am **now** asking for the implementation of the activities below at this time.*

All non-essential gatherings should be canceled, postponed, or done remotely. Unfortunately, at this time, I have no standard definition of “non-essential” or “gathering” to guide your decisions. Use your best judgment.

Stop shaking hands.

Increase in the amount of remote working or teleworking to the extent possible especially for those who appear at higher risk for developing the disease, those over the age of 60 and those with compromised immune systems.

Under all circumstances, stop touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth with your unwashed hands.

We here at CCSM want to be a vital aspect of the community mitigation and do our part to lessen the impact of the virus.

What can you do for yourself spiritually during this time? I invite you to continue to practice gratitude for all the blessings we do have; to pray for the most vulnerable in the community; to pray for wisdom for our leaders at the national, regional and local levels; to take time to breathe deeply and to remember that the power of love casts out fear; to value the preciousness of life; to remember that you are not alone and that you have a faith community loving you and praying for you.

The psalmist left us these timeless words:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

‘Be still, and know that I am God!

And lastly, since ‘wash your hands” has become the clarion call these days, here is an excerpt about turning the washing of hands into a spiritual practice:

We are humans relearning to wash our hands.

Washing our hands is an act of love

Washing our hands is an act of care

Washing our hands is an act that puts the hypervigilant body at ease

Washing our hands helps us return to ourselves by washing away what does not serve.

Wash your hands like you are washing the only teacup left that your great grandmother carried across the ocean, like this water is poured from a jug your best friend just carried for three miles from the spring they had to climb a mountain to reach.

Like water is a precious resource made from time and miracle. (Dori Midnight)

May the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and mind centered on love,

Penny