HILLS CHURCH
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

March 13, 2020

Dear Church Members and Friends,

After prayerful consideration, we have decided to close the church building to worship services and meetings of the congregation - including small group meetings - through at least March 27 in order to minimize physical contact and support our wider community's effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This decision is informed by recommendations from the CDC and the United Church of Christ, and it aligns with the closing of public schools in Wellesley and surrounding towns, as well as our neighboring faith communities. We are in this together.

As we limit our physical presence together, we will work to provide opportunities for Sunday worship and other gatherings online and other forms of remote communication. As of today, we can share the following initiatives and decisions.

- We will work to provide a video presentation of Sunday worship online, in a modified form, with only clergy and select worship leaders present in the sanctuary.
- Clergy will provide pastoral care by phone and electronic communication, but we will limit personal visitation in order to observe appropriate precautions.
- Working with the Deacons, Seniors Ministry Team, and the Care Team, we will develop plans to reach out to members of our community who may be especially vulnerable to the effects of disruption and self-isolation, to assess how we may be of assistance.
- All small groups, boards, and ministry teams meetings normally held in person, will, henceforth, be conducted via conference calls, video conference, or other digital platforms. We are in the process of contacting the leader of each group to offer support and guidance.
- We are working to provide new ways to share resources for worship, prayer, and spiritual practices for our members of all ages over the next two weeks.
- The Easter Egg Hunt scheduled for April 4 has also been cancelled, as have all Church School, Confirmation, and Youth Group classes and activities. Anne Marie Holloway, WHCC Associate Minister for Youth and Families, and Sally Tomasetti, WHCC Children's Ministry Coordinator, are working on online offerings to compensate.

I made this decision together with our congregation's moderators, senior Deacons, and key representatives of the safe church committee and church staff, and I am grateful for their careful discernment. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors, and we believe an act of love is to "flatten the curve" of this novel virus, seeking to protect the most vulnerable members of our community and to support the work of local health care professionals.

Our plans are provisional, as we continue to actively monitor the situation, including recommendations from state and local officials, the CDC, and the United Church of Christ, and we will communicate updates as they become available.

Exceptions to the closure of the church building will be made for programs that are deemed to be essential services, which may include the Wellesley Food Pantry and AA meetings.

There is certainly a sadness to this decision. Entering the sanctuary for worship is a healing balm for many, and we had important plans for this season, including special music Sunday. There are many preparations that will now be delayed and revised, with updates to be shared. Again, we are in this together.

Remember that God meets you right where you are, wherever that may be, as affirmed by the psalmist's prayer that is printed below.

May God bless us with wisdom and courage for the living of these days.

Peace,

Rev. Matt Wooster
Senior Minister

> *Where can I go from your spirit?*
> *Or where can I flee from your presence?*
> *If I ascend to heaven, you are there;*
> *if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.*
> *If I take the wings of the morning*
> *and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,*
> *even there your hand shall lead me,*
> *and your right hand shall hold me fast.*
> *-Psalm 139:7-10*

To contact your clergy:
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