

March 13, 2020

Dear friends,

This morning's 5 a.m. wake-up call from the Loudoun County Public Schools actually woke me up, but it also heightened how awake all of us should be with regards to the public health threat of the Coronavirus COVID-19. Yes, I had been tracking it like most all of you, considering what precautions to take, praying for the health of beloved family and friends and for our public officials who are guiding our response so that we can mitigate the sickness and hurt that is ominously present. With the members of the Session at St. Andrew and in conjunction with the Neighborhood Learning Center Board, we play a smaller public role, seeking how to best make decisions for our church and school. In consultation with the Loudoun County Health Department, we have decided **to worship together online for the next two Sundays** and **to keep the school open for our children** – at least until further notice from the NLC Board. Additional information from them is forthcoming.

We believe this is the right decision for now but recognize that it may be best to change it in the near future. We want to be vigilant, and we make these decisions with some strong caveats.

First, we recognize that many of our congregants have compromised immune systems and/or are sixty years old or more. Since we do not wish to jeopardize the health of anyone associated with St. Andrew, we will provide a feed for our services so that you can be with us virtually. As we start this streaming service, you will need to "like" our St. Andrew Presbyterian Church Facebook page in order to join us. We hope that we will soon be able to make the feed available on our St. Andrew web page, both as a live feed and to be watched later as a recording. We want you to worship with your friends and family as the St. Andrew congregation – even when we cannot gather physically.

Second, for those present at the school, we encourage vigilant hygienic practices. Don't ask me for a hug over the next little while. I'm going to model the kinds of spatial distancing that is healthy for all of us to practice. I will be washing my hands thoroughly and frequently. The NLC will require a health screen of every child and staff member coming into the building daily so that we are clear that those with raised temperatures, coughing, sneezing and the like return home. We feel that we can be together in small groupings, especially as we practice these strict standards. When I asked the Loudoun County Health Department employee why the public schools have closed but we are not asked to do so, she said that it was a matter of effected population. The schools are attended by 85,000; our school has approximately 150. That said, a rising threat level may lead us to change this decision and to close school.

Having said all of that, we also want to continue to be a worshiping, caring, serving congregation. The Session members and I will be calling all of our members over the next few days. We want to hear from you about how you are faring. Are you concerned about shopping and would appreciate someone getting groceries for you? We can make sure that happens. Did the church somehow lose or not get your latest email address and other contact information? We will set you up again. Would you like to continue meetings such as the Brunch Bunch or the Book Club or various committees remotely? We have a Zoom service that will allow us to arrange for meetings like that. We also want to spend time talking with you just so that we don't leave members feeling isolated and lonely.

I've also been in touch with our mission partner organizations like Loudoun Hunger Relief and Mobile Hope. They could use our help with foodstuffs and the like. Also, many of their volunteers are over 60 and they would very much appreciate those who are younger to help with food distribution and other outreach efforts. The same Jesus who touched and healed the leper wants us to keep in touch with others so that we live out his calling to be a loving people who build trust and good will while serving each other. And while we may not see each other face-to-face for a bit, we also ask that you continue your support of our church by giving online or by mail.

We know that the seeds of ideas we have are but a small beginning to the other insights our congregation members will also have. So, when we call, tell us your ideas and needs. Join with us as we use this time to practice and demonstrate our faithful following of Jesus. Let us be vigilant in our promotion of health in our world and in our community together. But also let us find ways to bless others as essential to our calling.

Blessings to you and thank you for your continued faithfulness.

Yours,

Pastor David Milam