

Greetings Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

These days I find myself revisiting some old feelings that are a bit familiar. I am thinking back on my days as chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy when we experienced outbreaks of the flu. It happened every year at least once. To contain the spread of the flu to other residents, a quarantine would be put into effect. At the time when I worked there, this meant all activities including chapel services were canceled, residents had to eat in their rooms, visitation was prohibited unless there was an emergency and residents were to stay in their rooms. Washing hands, using hand sanitizer and wearing surgical masks were necessary. The housekeeping staff were constantly washing down high-touch surfaces.

The staff had to find creative ways to help the residents pass the time. I provided the usual twice a week worship services from the chapel, using the sound system. Yes, I preached to an empty chapel. Those were challenging and dreaded times, particularly for the residents. Quarantines ended only after there were no new cases of the flu for three days among both the residents and the staff. So, we were never sure how quickly a quarantine would end. Many lasted a few weeks. But we got through it.

I honestly never expected to experience anything similar to that while serving as a pastor in a church. The Coronavirus pandemic has all of us on edge. The leadership chair, Julie Hermann; director of music, Burton Young and I have been keeping up-to-date on the latest CDC (The Center for Disease Control), State and Federal instructions. Currently, added to the list of instructions from the CDC, it is recommended that we do not meet in groups of ten or more.

Therefore, the following have been cancelled or postponed for at least the next two weeks:

- Sunday school and worship services on March 22nd and 29th
- Temple and Bell choir rehearsals
- Meetings (we are hoping to have Leadership Team meeting on the 31st)
- Youth Club
- The work day scheduled for March 21
- The bowling activity
- Love Feast (at the recommendation of our District Executive, Gene Hagenberger) is postponed
- Membership classes
- The youth dinner fundraiser

In two weeks, we will evaluate the situation according to the CDC's guidelines and update you. In the meantime, we are planning to provide worship experiences on Facebook Live on Sunday mornings at 10:00. If you are not on Facebook but have access to a computer, all of my sermons get posted on the Hagerstown Church of the Brethren webpage.

Also, your giving is an expression of your love and trust in God; and it conveys your desire to be an extension of Christ's presence and love to each other and the world around us through our ministries and outreach. Even as we navigate our way through this difficult time, your giving is important for keeping the church operational and for fulfilling our obligations. Since we do not have an online option for you to use to give your offerings, we suggest you mail your offering to the church; or if you need to run an errand and want to drop it off at the church, you can do that.

Beverly will be in the office during her usual hours to take your calls and emails. Kevin will be busy disinfecting the church. If you need to reach me and I am not at the church, please call or text me. Leave a message if I do not answer and I will get back to you. While we will do our best to get this information to everyone, I encourage you to check-in with those who do not have email and those who are new to the church, to make sure they have the latest communication.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago in my sermon, we will have valley experiences that we will need to walk through. We are never alone as we make the journey through the valley. We have each other...and we have God walking with us and leading the way back up to the mountaintop again. Let us pray the journey will not be a long one. Take care and stay well.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Twyla