



Members and Friends of First Presbyterian Church,

On Monday evening the Session of First Presbyterian met to prayerfully discern our church's way forward during this time of uncertainty. The decisions outlined below are the fruit of that discussion. They are guided, most certainly, by the recommendations of our health and government officials, but also reflect Christ's call to protect and care for the most vulnerable among us.

To that end and for the safety and well-being of each person in our community, all worship and church activities are suspended through April 10th. This includes all Sunday morning activities, worship and educational, all meetings, fellowship groups, and Bible studies. On April 7th the Session will be reconvening to make a formal decision on whether we will hold in-person worship on Easter Sunday (*April 12*) and the following weeks. This is a fluid situation. The Session and staff will provide updates and keep you informed about when worship and activities will resume.

During this time, we will continue to offer worship by posting on our home page (www.fpccr.org) a weekly curation of song, scripture, message and prayer. There will be links to educational pieces as well as devotions. A new worship page will appear each Sunday at 10:00am. It is hard sometimes to imagine church without the face-to-face interactions we all cherish, however we are taking steps to develop new ways of connecting with and supporting one another during this time. Watch your mailbox, inbox, website and First Presbyterian Facebook page for additional resources and information in the coming weeks. We also hope that you are taking time to reach out - whether it be by phone call or Facetime.

The Session was also mindful that our building serves as an incredible resource to the community of Cedar Rapids, serving some of its most vulnerable populations that are only going to be increasingly stressed and perhaps increasing in number during the coming days. We think we have found solutions for each of these that allow for continued outreach to our community, yet keep volunteers and program participants safe.

SEMP: Our SEMP program will continue with these changes. All meals will be created for and served in "to go" packaging by a group of volunteers in our kitchen. The City of Cedar Rapids has asked us to bring a number of those meals to the Overflow Shelter and Willis Dady as central distribution sites. We also anticipate distributing a number of the meals off carts in the parking lot at our own church for those who are not a part of the shelter system.

Family Promise: A big thank you to the congregation of St. Stephens Lutheran. The Family Promise families are moving into their space to live 24/7 until this outbreak resolves. This allows them to not be exposed to so many of our host churches' volunteers.

Linn County Emergency Food Pantry: The Food Pantry continues to operate on a daily basis with new protocol. Volunteers are pre-packaging "to go" bags of grocery supplies which are then distributed out in our parking lot eliminating the need for congested lines.

RISE: The board of RISE has made the decision to suspend services to their clients until April 6th, at which point they will be reassessing.

Staff are continuing to work, though they have been encouraged to do so as much as they can out of their home. If you need to meet with me or another member of the staff, please contact them to set up a time as we may not be available if you drop in. I am currently planning on regular hours in the church from 10am-noon each day. Church doors will be locked during the day, so again, advance notification is needed for entry.

Our theme for Lent this year is Wilderness...and it certainly seems as though we have entered that metaphorical space as a community, a city, a country and a world. Yet in the wilderness we have found that God is faithful and provides, that there are opportunities for surprising connection, and that we have new ways of being opened before us. We believe that God walks with us through this time, and that knowledge allows us to move forward in trust and hope instead of fear and anxiety.

Grace & Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pastor Heather".

Pastor Heather Hayes