

## Peace Lutheran Church Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) – March 14, 2020

People of Peace,

In the words of Paul in Philippians 1:2, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Over and over in scripture, God says to us, “Do not fear.” Jesus says in Matthew 28:20, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” In this unprecedented time as we face together a health crisis that the World Health Organization has called a global pandemic, we look to God for strength, courage, and hope. And we proceed with caution, prudence, and love for the most vulnerable in our midst.

First, we pray for all who are affected all over the world, for medical professionals caring for the ill, for medical researchers seeking a vaccine, for public health workers laboring around the clock, for governments and agencies all over the world working to stop this health threat, and for our congregation and community as we seek to care for each other and ourselves.

In a press conference on Wednesday, Governor Jay Inslee announced a ban on public gatherings of more than 250 people. The idea is that with “social distancing,” we will work together to slow the spread of the virus. In our small church on Sundays, well under this amount of people gather. At the same time, health officials are advising organizations to limit public gatherings in which people are in close contact with others.

On Thursday, Tacoma Public Schools announced that schools will be closed starting Monday March 16 and will remain closed for six weeks. Bishop Rick Jaech of our ELCA Southwestern Washington Synod sent a letter offering congregations suggestions on how to make adjustments to ministry in the interest of everyone’s health and with concern for the most vulnerable among us. We have also consulted medical professionals in the congregation.

With all this in mind and for a temporary period of time, Peace Lutheran Church is making intentional changes that impact worship and ministry. In this season of Lent, we often give up some things in order to pay closer attention to our relationship with God. Lent is also a time of reflection, looking inward, self-care, and solitude. We encourage folks to consider the following changes part of our Lenten practice and to lean in to listen to God as we care for one another.

1. **Sunday Worship at 8:30 am and 11 am, Sunday School, Sunday Breakfast, and Peace Lutheran Church public gatherings will be canceled beginning Sunday March 15 and suspended until further notice** to help contain the spread of the coronavirus. Here are the main reasons. Sunday worship, faith education classes, and meal fellowship are where folks gather in close proximity. We are concerned about members of our worshiping community particularly vulnerable to coronavirus including seniors, folks with underlying medical conditions, and those with limited access to adequate health care. We are aware that social distancing is a big factor in reducing the spread of the virus and continue to see more and more local organizations, including small churches, canceling their public events. As we seek to live out our call to love and care for our neighbors, Peace Lutheran Church will do all we can to be part of the solution to this health crisis rather than risk further exposure of vulnerable people.
  - Although we are not gathering for public worship, we will provide a video online Sunday morning worship service, including a message, posted on the church website ([www.peacelutherantacoma.org](http://www.peacelutherantacoma.org)) and Facebook page by 1 pm each Sunday beginning this Sunday March 15. We will also post faith resources we hope will be helpful to our community. Please call the church office if you need help accessing online resources.

2. **Wednesday Midweek Lent Gatherings, Small Groups, and Church Meetings:** We are suspending these group gatherings and meetings for a time. We will post videos and faith resources on the church website and Facebook on Wednesdays in lieu of Lent gatherings. If you are a leader of a small group or meeting, please choose to cancel or do a conference or Zoom call. Please call the church office for more details.
3. **Food:** For the Friday evening and April weekday community meals, we will serve all meals in “to go” containers at the door and avoid congregating inside the building in an effort to protect everyone’s health. Beyond these community meals, we will not serve any food for any other gatherings.
4. **Care for Our Most Vulnerable:** Please be aware of those in our faith community and neighborhood who are at higher risk. With many people choosing to stay home to avoid interacting with others, loneliness and increased anxiety will be common. Reach out with a call, text, or card to share a word of prayer or encouragement. Our Care Ministry will be intentionally seeking to show this care. If you are available to provide a meal or run an errand for someone who is isolated, please contact Jeanie Correa at 253-278-3390. If you have a special need or feel isolated, please contact Pastor John at 253-383-1317 ext. 101.
5. **Church Staff:** At this time, our church staff will be working regular hours, sometimes choosing to work from home. We will be as responsive as possible to messages left for us.
6. **Everyday Life:** Please follow these health best practices to minimize risk and exposure:
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
  - Avoid close contact with sick people.
  - Use a tissue or your elbow to cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash your hands.
  - Keep a respectful distance from others when you are talking to them.
  - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
  - Stay home and away from others when you're sick.
7. **Respect for All:** Please, please equip yourself with facts and be responsible for dismantling the myths and stigmas that have resulted in ignorance and discrimination. COVID-19 does not recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity. We can interrupt stigma by sharing accurate information and speaking up if we hear, see, or read misinformation, or witness or experience harassment or discrimination.
8. **Financial Giving:** Please make special effort to continue giving financial support to Peace Lutheran Church and other key organizations, especially in a time like this. We trust that our budgeted income for offerings will remain strong in these challenging weeks. Many church members share their offerings in worship at Peace. If you will be missing worship for several weeks, please send your offering by mail or electronic means. If you would like to get set up for regular online giving, please contact Damishe Greenwood-Walker in the church office at 253-383-1317. You may also make a secure donation on the church website.

God bless you and keep you in these uncertain and challenging times! Together we know that we have all come this far by faith, and we trust God to carry us into the future.

Pastor John Stroeh