



Muhlenberg Lutheran Church

Open # Authentic # Relational # Serving

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Dear people of Muhlenberg,

We are living in unprecedented times. The rapid developments surrounding COVID-19 (Coronavirus) have been hard to absorb. Many of us live in anxiety, concerned about our health, potential financial repercussions, and uncertainty about what is yet to come.

And yet the church remains strong. We are still the body of Christ, even as we are now dispersed. We will continue to care for one another through this time. In fact, one of the most powerful ways we are caring for one another is through this physical separation.

But even more importantly, we trust that God's love never fails. We are not alone in this time of crisis and can lean on God's sure and steady presence in times of trouble.

As we do so, we will be creative and patient as we together live into this new reality for the coming weeks. This letter contains information on how we plan to continue to be church together even while we are apart.

COMMUNICATION

If you have access to email, we ask you to sign up for Muhlenberg's email updates. You can do this at www.muhlenberglutheran.org. Email is the quickest and most effective way for us to send updates. If you do not have email, please contact a fellow member and ask that they keep you updated, or call and leave a message at the church office that you need assistance receiving updates.

Our website and Facebook page will also be good sources for up-to-date information, as well as links to *The Chimes*, and information about the *Wellstream* livestreaming project. In addition, we now have a Zoom video conferencing account, which allows us to hold meetings, Bible studies, and other gatherings online. If you would like to set up a Zoom meeting for your group or class during this time of social distancing, please email Pastor Alex (zuber@muhlenberglutheran.org) and he will gladly do that. Congregation Council held their meeting via Zoom last night and while it was certainly not as nice as being together in person, all agreed it was a great way to be together virtually.

WORSHIP

At the advice of the Virginia Synod, we have suspended in-person worship through April 1, at which time we will reassess. Given the current CDC recommendation of having no gatherings of more than 50 people for 8 weeks, it seems likely that our time away from communal worship could last longer. In the meantime, we will have a **live-streamed worship service on Sunday mornings at 11 am**. You can watch this on Muhlenberg's Facebook page or YouTube channel. If you're not able to tune in at 11 am, the video will be available any time.

If you joined us for worship online this past Sunday, you probably noticed we had some difficulties with the sound. We are hard at work fixing those problems and are hopeful that the sound will be noticeably improved in weeks to come. We also heard feedback that you'd appreciate having a bulletin and hymns so you can follow along—and that will be available via our website starting this Sunday as well!

Also starting this Sunday will be an **online "coffee hour" experience from 10:30-11 am**. A link to the Zoom meeting will be emailed this week. Make yourself a cup of coffee and sign in to visit with your church family before you head over to worship on Facebook or YouTube.

On Wednesdays at noon, we will have a brief prayer service on Facebook. Tune in live, or watch the video later.

On Wednesdays at 6 pm, we will host "dinner church" through Zoom. Sit down with your meal and sign in for prayer and conversation.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

ALL activities at the church have been cancelled through April 1, at which point we will reassess. This includes Bible studies, choirs, and small groups as well as Second Home, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Day Care, People Helping People, and the numerous support groups that use our space. Though it pains us to take such a drastic measure, we feel we must act in the best interest of the community as a whole. We continue to take measures to keep the building clean and disinfected so it will be ready for us when we return!

The church office will have sporadic hours for the next two weeks. Staff will mainly be working from home. If you need to reach a staff person and don't have their home/cell phone number, call the office. Staff will check voicemail frequently or have instructions for reaching them.

THE PASTORS

Both Pastor Lauren and Pastor Alex will be working throughout this time to stay connected with as many people as possible. While they will not be meeting in person with anyone except those in critical situations, they are both available for phone conversations, email, and video meetings. Simply email or call—they'll be happy to hear from you! Pastor Lauren's phone number is 248-953-0698, and Pastor Alex can be reached at 540-309-2414, or call the church office.

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Area Shepherds will be making phone calls this week to those in their Shepherd Group. They'll be asking questions about needs you may have, as well as ways you may want to serve over the coming weeks. We'll be setting up phone partners to check in with one another, grocery and pharmacy runners who can help others avoid exposure, and whatever else we need to make sure we all stay safe and connected through this time.

Let us be creative and resourceful as we find new ways to care for one another. Be kind and patient with others—we're all doing the best we can. Take time to care for yourself, as well.

FAITH FORMATION

For some of us, this time of social distancing provides an opportunity to slow down, and experience "sabbath" in a new way. We'll be providing resources and links on our Facebook page for families and individuals to use to deepen faith together.

This also may be a great time to read the Pastors' Book Club selection for April, *Aging Matters: Finding Your Calling for the Rest of Your Life*, by R. Paul Stevens. You can order it online, or contact Pastor Lauren to be added to the list for our group order. Hopefully we'll be able to gather on our scheduled date of Wednesday, April 22 at 6:30 pm to discuss it together.

GENEROSITY

The church is certainly not suspending its ministry through this season, and we ask you not to suspend your financial contributions either. We are committed to paying our staff and maintaining our ministries, even if they will be in a different form for now. We also want to be able to continue to support the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. You can make a one-time or recurring donation through www.muhlenberglutheran.org, or mail your check to the church at 281 E. Market St, Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

IN CONCLUSION...

It turns out that this situation is not, in fact, unprecedented for Muhlenberg Lutheran Church. Muhlenberg faced a health-related closure in October 1918, when all churches in Harrisonburg were forced to close for several weeks during the Spanish flu epidemic. Muhlenberg survived and came out of that period with a new communion practice: the use of individual communion cups.

Our identity as a Wellspring of God's Grace does not change during this season, even as our methods of sharing in God's mission might. We will continue to be church for the sake of the world. And God will continue to be faithful.

O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Still be our guard while troubles last, And our eternal home.

In Christ,

Pastor Lauren and Pastor Alex