



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF SAN ANTONIO

LOVING CHRIST. LOVING ONE ANOTHER. LOVING THE CITY.

March 18, 2020

Update for the Congregation

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*

Psalm 46:1-3

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

The news is full of reports about the continuing COVID -19 crisis in our country, around the world, and here in San Antonio. Your church leaders are paying close attention to information as it is released and are prayerfully and diligently considering the implications for the life and ministry of First Presbyterian Church and our covenant partners.

Monday night, the Session (the council of ruling elders of the church) met to discuss FPC's response to the COVID -19 situation. The meeting was thoughtful, courageous and prayerful. It was wonderful to be in a group of leaders who have dedicated themselves to trust in the Lord our God and to lean on his sovereignty even in one of the most confusing situations our community has faced in some time.

After much prayer and discussion, the leaders of the church have determined that our congregation will follow a plan that is innovative in our ministry, courageous in our compassion, supportive of our civil and national leadership, and sensitive to both the health and fears of our community and congregation. Together the elders have set forward a series of directives for the ongoing work and fellowship of our church.

The precautions outlined by the Session set the necessary ground rules and boundaries to both protect the most vulnerable in our community and to support the leadership of our local, state and national authorities.

Worship:

We will broadcast a weekly digital worship service through the end of April, including Holy Week and Easter Sunday. This service will air at 11:00 Sunday mornings from fpcsanantonio.org, the FPC app and our FPC Facebook Page. Video recordings of the services and audio podcasts of the sermons will also be available through these platforms.

Memorial Services and Weddings:

Following CDC guidelines, we will perform only private services of 50 in attendance or less. Arrangements will be made in consultation with the Pastoral staff. Public services to be scheduled at the resolution of the pandemic.

Church Events:

The church facility will be closed through the end of April for all activities, meeting and events. We are moving to cancel all outside events through the end of April. KRL and Loaves & Fishes activities have been transferred to CAM.

If committee meetings are necessary, they should occur virtually. As much as possible, we will encourage and equip Bible study groups to meet virtually with pre-recorded video resources and posted materials.

While the FPC Children's Center will largely continue to follow SAISD closures, future communications and decisions will be in consultation with Senior Staff prior to communication with parents.

Regular business operations will continue.

We will continue to receive mail, make deposits, pay bills and pay payroll, however, most of the work will happen remotely. We encourage covenant partners to continue to tithe and to download our church app for ease in doing so.

Although the facility will be closed, the Pastors, Senior Staff and Program Staff may be reached by cell phone or email. A receptionist will be available to receive and direct calls to the church from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Communications:

The communications plan will include communicating hope, a plan for worship, equipping families, and a plan for how we will care for both our congregation and our community. We will communicate information promptly through fpcsanantonio.org, the FPC app, our FPC social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter), email and U.S. postal service.

Please understand our leadership is not driven by fear of the disease. We are driven by our compassion for one another and our neighbors. We are not reacting out of fear of **getting** the disease. We are practicing these principles of social distancing as a precaution against **spreading** the disease.

This is an environment of precautions and possibilities. Having established the precautions, now we can focus on the possibilities.

- We are developing specific plans to serve the pastoral needs of our covenant partners and our congregation, especially our homebound and most vulnerable members.
- We are increasing our communication capacity so that people will be able to contact Pastors and leaders with their ideas, needs and concerns.
- We are in regular communication with our mission partners, locally and globally, learning about how to support them.
- We are discussing new ways of teaching, learning and growing together.
- We are thinking creatively about how to reach out to our homeless neighbors.
- We are developing plans to reach out and share the gospel hope of Jesus Christ with our neighbors and the members of our community who are scared, without hope and who may be turning to the church for comfort for the first time in their lives. This is a time for us to lift up Jesus Christ, so that all people may be drawn to him. (John 12:32)

Prayer:

Throughout this crisis, we will be a praying church. We need to pray not only for ourselves, but for those most at risk in this crisis.

I propose that wherever you are, at noon each day, we hold a prayer vigil. Stop and take a few minutes to pray for our families, our covenant partners, our friends and neighbors, our city, and especially our leaders. We should pray for health, for guidance, for clarity for our leaders, and especially for a cure and relief from the sickness. Most of all we should continue to pray for courage and patience as we trust in the Lord's healing.

Covenant Partnership:

When we joined our new denomination we gave up our old understanding of the word "member" and adopted the designation of "Covenant Partner." The implication of the change is that we are bound together as a church, not to be served personally, but to serve our Lord, one another and our neighbors. It is your responsibility as a Covenant Partner to

stay informed. Now is the time for us all to embrace the real meaning of covenant partnership by heeding the precautions of the Session and seizing the possibilities to serve in new ways.

As your Pastor, I try not to be pushy in the use of the authority of this office. Now, however, I must insist that you download and use the FPC smartphone App and regularly check the website for information. I also expect you to open and read all communications from the church.

The question before us is how to love Jesus Christ, love one another and love the city in this crisis. As a congregation, we want to be both good citizens and good neighbors, respecting the civil authorities under whom we live. Please understand, the directives outlined by the session are the precautions. Our possibilities are wide-open. The church facility may be closed but the Church is not.

May the Lord bless our ministry in this moment as He promised in Isaiah 58:8:

May our... *light break forth like the dawn, and our healing spring up speedily;*

May our... *righteousness go before us and the glory of the LORD be our rear guard.* (Paraphrase)

Grace and Peace,
Bob Fuller
Sr. Pastor