



28 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Immanuel:

One of the benefits of being part of an ancient tradition is that we have a whole lot of ancestors, many forebears in the faith, who have gone through a lot. They lived through wars, fire, famines, persecutions by despotic rulers, and all manner of sickness, including plagues and pandemics. We can draw on their strength, wisdom, and example, and how they experienced God showing up, when we are going through our own challenges. I recently came across this short passage from Martin Luther, the medieval reformer, written during a time of plague in 1527. He wrote a letter called "Whether One May flee from a Deadly Plague," including these words:

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.

"If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God. If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbor close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him."

Sounds like Martin Luther was talking about social distancing! But he was also talking about the Christian call to care for one another at the same time. I love the way he held these in creative tension, and I hope that we as a parish are doing the same. . . distancing, yet remaining tight.

In that vein, I have several updates to share with you:

Further postponement of physically gathering for worship:

Our Bishop has decided that the first possible day for our re-gathering physically for worship will be Sunday, May 8th. This is, of course, subject to review and how the situation is developing. We as a parish yearn for gathering again, but we will also do all we can to remain connected and vitally involved during the interim.

Holy Week and Easter

This challenging situation includes, of course, the heart of the Christian year. We are planning now for virtual observances of Holy Week and Easter. Our goal in observing these holy occasions will be to engage them as deeply as possible virtually, while also avoiding anything tacky, cute, or unbecoming to their solemnity. I hope we can strike that balance, with God's help.

Thanks to our virtual crew!

Thanks to all those who have been working on our virtual, online services! These services are not what any of us would choose to be doing, compared to our in-person, usual community. Yet our goal for

them is still to be worshipful, for God to be praised and God's people to be edified. We take yet another new leap tomorrow morning, as we move towards a fully live-streamed service of Morning Prayer, beginning at 9AM. We also send out a bulletin for you to use during the service. Another first will follow, a virtual coffee hour, where we may hear and see one another. Please follow the links sent to you to engage both opportunities. If you can't watch the service "live" it will also be recording and available when it works for you. I especially thank Mark Fearer, Scott Hovis, Brooke Roberts, Sandra Graham, and Paul Lartey for their ongoing dedication and diligence in making this possible.

Hard-working Vestry!

I am grateful to our Vestry, who have taken it upon themselves to write notes to all of the people in our Directory. I have you have received one! If not, please let us know and we will rectify that right away. The Vestry and I are also having weekly videoconference check-ins during this time.

Continued financial support of our Parish

Thanks to all those who have continued sending their pledges and offerings through the mail or through *tithely* on our webpage. Some have even advanced their schedule of payments, given this current situation, and I am so grateful and awed by your inspiring witness. If you have not yet been able to continue your pledge during our time apart I would encourage you either to use this link: https://tithely.com/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/12176 or the regular mail. We must look after the physical and financial health of the parish now so that it will be in good shape and ready to serve when we emerge from this time of challenge.

Opportunities to help others

Some have asked how they might contribute towards the Discretionary Fund, an often-used channel for meeting human need in our community. This fund often helps people with rent, utility bills, food, etc. This includes both members of the community and sometimes folks from within the parish. If you would like to contribute you may simply send a check made payable to Immanuel, with "Discretionary Fund" on the memo line.

Online support and prayer group

I am planning to hold a "support group" session, via Zoom, for those who might need to talk and share what they are going through right now, whether it be work or family challenges, fear, or even boredom. Looks for these details soon, and we'll see if this seems to meet a need.

Clergy phone calls

The Rev. Susan Parsons and I are also making a lot of random phone calls to check in on folks, so don't be surprised if you hear from us soon. We are all in this together, and this is yet another way we can support each other in this time.

This note wouldn't be complete if I didn't say that I just miss you all!

May God bless you until, as the old saying goes, we meet again,

Randy

The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.
Rector