



Beloved,

We're all feeling the turmoil right now as we grapple with the conflicting messages and rapid changes in response to the spread of COVID-19 locally and globally. Here are some relevant updates in the situation since I last wrote to you:

- The World Health Organization has declared that COVID-19 is a global pandemic.
- Gov. Phil Murphy has declared a state of emergency in NJ and asked that gatherings of 250 people or more be cancelled.
- NJ Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli indicated that the reason for the cancellations is that the novel coronavirus is in a phase known as “community spread” in NJ.
- Persichilli says that officials will be monitoring the rate of infection and may ask for more stringent limitations on public activity if the rate increases.
- In other parts of the country this week, churches have cancelled worship or have been asked to cancel worship services.
- Many of our neighboring churches of similar size to us (First Congregational Church Montclair, Union Congregational Church Montclair, and Park UMC in Bloomfield, to name a few), have decided to cancel in-person worship services and meetings for at least the next two weeks.
- Experts around the world are urging the public to take this crisis seriously.
 - They're telling people in vulnerable groups (those over 60 or with underlying medical issues) to avoid crowds.
 - They're asking all of us (even if we're young and healthy and don't have much to fear from the virus ourselves) to help slow the rate of infection by practicing “social distancing.”
 - Slowing the rate of infection will help to save lives by “flattening the curve” and reducing the pressure on our healthcare system—if everybody gets sick at once, there won't be enough intensive care units or ventilators for the most vulnerable in the United States.

John Dobbs, your Moderator, and I, after hearing input and concerns from many of you, have decided it would be best for us to join in solidarity with our community, to follow the advice of experts, and to protect the most vulnerable **by cancelling in-person worship this Sunday, March 15 and next Sunday, March 22**. Church leadership will be reevaluating whether to reopen the sanctuary after the 22nd.

While we're cancelling in-person worship, we're not cancelling worship all together: We'll be offering a live-streamed worship service (of some sort! I can promise you at least a sermon and some music!) on the [GRCC Facebook page](#) starting at 10 AM. You'll need a Facebook account to watch. It will be the first time we've ever done something like this, so please bear with us if it's a bit of an amateur hour! And give us feedback on the experience so that we can make improvements.

We're also not cancelling LOVE, or community, or care for one another. If you're in need of a friend to talk to, or if you're stuck at home without groceries because it's not advisable for you to go out right now, or if you need anything else at all, please reach out to your church friends or your pastor.

See you on Facebook on Sunday morning. In the meantime, be safe, be sanitized, and be kind to one another!

Pastor Jeff