

Dear members and friends of St. Mark's,

After much thought and conversation, the council of St. Mark's has come to the decision to put worship services and scheduled meetings on hold until Sunday, April 12th (Easter Sunday) due to the COVID-19 virus. A letter is attached that explains this decision in further detail. Please know that such a decision was not made lightly as we know how important it is for us to gather regularly for worship, social interaction, and support, especially at times like this.

Because of this we want you to know that you can contact Pastor Dave at any time if you would like a pastoral visit or pastoral care, and Sue or any council member if you find yourself in need of other kinds of support such as picking up food at the grocery store or something else, even if it is simply someone to talk with if you are feeling isolated or anxious.

It is important that we focus on the love and positive things in our lives and not let the fear and negativity take over. In the letter of Paul to the Philippians (4:13-14), he writes: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. It was kind of you to share my distress.**" He wrote this in a time of stress and need in his life and acknowledged how much his belief in Christ and the care of others helped him through it. May we do likewise in our faith community and beyond.

I am including my and Sue's personal phone numbers to ensure you know whom you should feel free to contact for care and support.

Pastor Dave at 519-656-3547
Sue Hammer at 519-502-2934

As well, I will be posting weekly sermons and updates on the St. Mark's website at <https://www.stmarkswellesley.ca> so that you can continue receiving weekly messages.

In God's love always,
Pastor Dave

March 16, 2020

Re: St Marks Worship Services and Meetings on Hold

Dear Members and Friends of St Marks,

Church Council has been reading news reports about COVID 19, suggestions from Synod and articles about how best to respond to the virus as individuals and as a congregation.

The most urgent and important recommendation from government officials at Municipal, Provincial and Federal levels are to implement actions to maintain social distance between all people in the community. It is important to understand that in Canada, recommendations for social distance are coming from scientists, doctors and professionals with experience handling virus outbreaks.

Since yesterday, Ontario has reported 42 new cases with most not linked to travel or previously known cases. This means the virus is now spreading in the community.

The purpose of social distancing is to slow the growth rate and “flatten the curve” to spread out serious cases that require the highest level of care in our hospitals. This level of care requires ventilators, isolation rooms, specialized personnel which are in limited supply. It is crucial that we all take action to help flatten the curve so our healthcare system is not overwhelmed by a massive increase in new COVID 19 cases and to ensure seriously ill people have access to the care they need.

We understand that most people infected will have relatively mild symptoms and will recover. However, there are people at greater risk like; people with pre-existing health conditions and older people. Social distancing is a community level response to protect the most vulnerable in society.

Social distancing means, at a minimum, keeping distance between people when out in the community; at least two metres. Medical Officers of Health are asking for more. This week, Canada has a chance to limit the spread of the virus, unlike some other countries that waited to implement social distancing until there were more people infected and in hospital.

We are being asked to stay home and limit outings to only essentials like medical appointments, getting groceries etc. This is also why all public buildings and services are being closed temporarily. The only hope to slow the virus is community behaviour; avoid all close contact with people unless necessary, never shake hands, wash hands and use hand sanitizer, avoid gatherings of people, do not travel. If we do these things we are less likely to catch the virus. If we don't have the virus, we can't infect anyone else. In countries where strict social distancing practices have been implemented, the spread of the virus has been slowed.

Therefore, St Marks Council has decided to put worship services and all church meetings on hold until April 12. We hope to be able to resume worship services for Easter Sunday. We will monitor the advice provided by the public health experts and the guidelines issued by the government and update this decision accordingly.

We understand that St Marks is a part of our support network. Dave, Sue and Council members will do our best to be aware of anyone who may need the support of the church during this time. We encourage everyone to keep in touch with friends and neighbours so no one feels alone during this very unusual time. Please let us know if you become aware of anyone in our church or broader community who may be in need of some support.

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church Council, Wellesley