



First Congregational Church

"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE MINISTER

Recently Bishop Jennifer Reddall reminded a group of judicatory leaders that the word "quarantine" comes from quaresima, the Italian word for Lent. The religious term was derived from the practice of ships being "quarantined" for 40 days in port before they were able to dock and unload people and supplies. We are living in a time of quarantine not only spiritually during Lent, but physically as we adapt our social behaviors in the effort to stop the spread of COVID19.

Yesterday the Southwest Conference Executive Board and I met to review the conference-wide response to COVID-19. With their support I am writing this morning to strongly recommend and respectfully request that all SWC congregations and communities suspend all inperson gatherings through at least Sunday, April 12, 2020. This recommendation includes all worship gatherings, small groups, rehearsals, Palm Sunday, Holy Week observances, and Easter Sunday. I am further recommending that all church staff aged 60 or over, and/or who have underlying medical conditions be offered 'working from home' opportunities immediately because they are at highest risk for severe to critical outcomes or death if they contract COVID-19. After consulting with chaplains and medical professionals I am also strongly recommending that SWC parish clergy stop making in-person pastoral visits, and instead, use virtual methods (phone, video chat, texting) for keeping in contact with people, and rely on chaplains serving hospitals, skilled care and rehabilitation facilities to provide any required inperson pastoral care to church members and their families.

We are asking this of you, our covenant partners, for many reasons:

- Our congregations are filled with people whose age and health conditions place them in the most at-risk groups for the worst possible outcomes COVID-19 can have on someone.
- Clergy continuing in-person visits and participating in gatherings increase not only their chances of contracting COVID-19, but significantly increase that likelihood for the persons with whom they are in contact.
- Entering public space is synonymous with risking exposure to COVID-19 through social transmission.
- The virus is now known to live in the air for several hours.
- The virus lives on surfaces for several days.
- Our ecumenical partners (ELCA, UMC, Episcopal, DOC, Roman Catholic) throughout the Southwest Conference have reached the same conclusion.

The best way to love one another and to love our neighbors as ourselves is not to be physically with people outside of our own living quarters until the spread of COVID-19 is controlled.

Leading By Example

I am not asking you to do anything beyond what the SWC staff is doing. All SWC meetings and trainings are being conducted by ZOOM. Conference staff is prohibited from travel for work. All SWC staff leaving the state or the country for personal reasons must self-isolate for two (2) weeks. The SWC building is now closed to all outside groups. Rev. Dr. Barbara Doerrer-Peacock and I are working from home. Plans are in place to extend 'working from home' to all staff by the end of this week. These measures will continue through Sunday, April 12, and will be extended as the public health situation warrants.

Supporting One Another

Our pastors and church leaders have already demonstrated their creativity, collaboration, and care by discovering new way to be church for their members and in their communities while being with them isn't possible. The SWC office has scheduled a series of zoom calls to support local leaders and congregations as we do ministry differently in these different times.

- Creative Pastoral Care during COVID-19 - Wed., March 18, 3 pm AZ/ 4 pm NM, TX (hosted by Rev. Sue Joiner)
- Chaplaincy during COVID-19 - Wed., March 18, 6 pm AZ/ 7 pm NM, TX (this call is open to our ecumenical partners and their colleagues; hosted by Rev. Dr. Bill Lyons)
- SWC Clergy Call during COVID-19 - Thurs., March 19, 8 am AZ/ 9 am NM, TX (updates, resource sharing, needs, technology, prayer)
- SWC Moderators & Treasurers - Thurs., March 19, 6:30 pm AZ/ 7:30 pm NM, TX (resources and strategies for financial sustainability during COVID-19; hosted by Rev. Dr. Bill Lyons)

We welcome and invite you to bring your wisdom to these conversations as we

resource and spark creativity for one another.

Gathering virtually, Maintaining social contact

We can still connect with one another in virtual spaces. Phone calls, video chats, small group meetings on web platforms like zoom, GoToMeeting, and others, emails, texting, Facebook, Instagram, GroupMe and more provide many ways stay and even increase our connectedness with one another. Yes, its different than being together. And in so many ways its easier to connect virtually. Many of our congregations are beginning to help and support members wanting to learn how to use these platforms for connectedness. This is not a time to be alone. This is a time to be together in different ways that don't include in-person contact.

Easter

Loving one another by not gathering in-person means we won't be at our church buildings for on the calendar date of Easter. Easter has long been a movable celebration in the Christian calendar. In fact, for centuries Christians have observed two dates for the Feast of the Resurrection - Orthodox Easter and Catholic/Protestant Easter. The earliest Christians gathered on Sunday for worship and fellowship because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. For them every first day of the week, or Sunday, was an Easter celebration. Whenever churches are able to gather in-person or virtually for worship we can celebrate Easter. Rescheduling events that need to take place in-person, like cantatas, is a sacrifice. And rescheduling is a way to love one another and our neighbors in times of pandemic.

Annual Meeting

Southwest Conference leaders are monitoring the pandemic very closely on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. At the beginning of April we will make a decision regarding the 2020 Annual Meeting. Our response is a measured one at this point. The decision about Annual Meeting will reflect our recommendations to you regarding in-person gatherings beyond Sunday, April 12. Do know that the conversation has already begun and that a contingency plan is ready for activation if the date of the 2020 Annual Meeting needs to be changed.

Camp

Southwest Conference and Arizona Disciples of Christ leaders have already been in conversation about this summer's DUCC Camp. Even if COVID-19 is no longer a threat other factors impact our ability to hold church camp, namely the probability of extended school schedules and the monetary impact of delaying a decision because the facility contract specifies financial obligations for canceling after certain dates. We are in conversation with the camp facility and will make prudent and timely decisions about DUCC Camp 2020.

A different kind of Lent

This is a Lent - *quaresima* - like none we have every experienced. As we journey closer to the cross in our seasonal pilgrimage the pandemic is in fact getting worse day by day. As I write to you the headline jumped onto my iPhone screen: "Coronavirus claims 93 lives," up from 68 yesterday. We do not know the challenges it yet holds for us. Right now, loving one another means giving up meeting together. Loving our neighbors means buying only what we need, sharing what we have, and staying home. And strangely by God's grace we are discovering richer, deeper, and maybe even more intimate ways of being there for one another while we cannot be with one another. May God bring healing to our world in every way.

Bill

MISSION NEWS AND UPDATES



This month's mission emphasis is the Prescott Area Habitat for Humanity (PAHH). PAHH helps low income families realize their dream of owning their own home. Those who qualify commit to doing "sweat equity" and to making mortgage payments based upon their annual income. Checks can be made payable to the church, with the memo, Habitat for Humanity.

Thanks to your generous giving to February's mission emphasis, a check for \$555. is being sent to the Prescott Area Shelter Services (PASS).

We continue to assist our "adopted" DACA student, Franceny Gardea, a student at Prescott College. This week, a check is being sent to help her make a tuition installment payment. We have established a special DACA fund to which you may donate anytime throughout the year.

Thank you for remembering that we have been blessed to be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2).
Comments/questions can be directed to our mission outreach team. Becky & Bill Bryant, Helaine Berman, Patty Gard, Linda Moore, Staci Robbins, Gary Gard, chairperson

[Watch Sermons Here](#)

● EVERY-WEEK COMMUNION

We have communion each week right after worship at the front of the sanctuary, everyone is welcome to participate.

Birthdays

Bret Ely 03/26 Andree Shrimpton 03/28

- **MONTHLY COMMUNION**

Our regularly scheduled communion is held the first Sunday of each month. Communion is open to all.

- **PASS MEAL**

Once a month, we provide a meal for Prescott Area Shelter Services, the third Wednesday of the month.

- **CABINET MEETING**

Meets the 4th Thursday of each month at 5:30 p.m. in the Office Conference Room unless otherwise announced.

- **BELL CHOIR REHEARSAL**

We will train you! We meet for rehearsal at 9:00 am. On Thursdays in the Hazeltine Room downstairs.

- **CHANCEL SINGERS**

We meet Sundays at 9:00 a.m. before worship service to rehearse. All are welcome.

- **ALTER-NOTES**

We meet at 12:00 p.m. on Sunday after Coffee Time in the Sanctuary Chancel. Contact Melissa if you are interested in joining: 207-391-3276

- **SUNDAY SCHOOL**

Children may participate with Sunday School downstairs after "Children's Time".

Susan Wilson 03/30
Janet Steven 04/08
Deana Wilson 04/27
Tom Lloyd 04/28

OFFICE COUNTER SCHEDULE

23 - - Susan and Suzaanne
30 - - Angela and Don

