Dear Friends in Faith,

As we continue our journey to the Cross, we find ourselves crafting a path very few of us have actually taken: wandering through the wilderness of what it means to experience the personal and communal effects of a pandemic.

What do we do in such a time as this? The easy answer? We pray. The detailed answer? We pray.

Romans 12:12 reminds us: Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. At the moment, we seem to be stuck in the middle part of this verse, the part that is causing us affliction. You might be watching gloomy, media statistics of the spreading danger. Maybe you find yourself surrounded by more family members than at a Thanksgiving dinner table. And yes, you might even be running out of toilet paper. All of these things are bound to cause more stress and anxiety than the usual day.

And yet, on either side of this reminder of affliction, we find both HOPE and PRAYER.

...And So We PRAY

We pray for the families who suddenly have no source of income.
We pray for the healthcare workers and scientists who come face-to-face with this calamity.
We pray for the grandparents who are suddenly teaching their grandchildren school.
We pray for the lonely, the isolated, the shut-ins.
We pray for the loved ones with whom we cannot be beside.
We pray for the ones whose health is already endangered by physical ailments and sickness.

As of today, Wednesday, March 18th, we are CANCELLING worship on March 22nd and March 29th. It is our HOPE that we might be able to resume worship services on Palm Sunday, April 5th, but that is too far into the future to be safely determined. Again, please verify through the ways listed on Page 2 if worship is indeed proceeding.

Ways to Worship at Home: If you have access to the internet, now would be a great time to virtually “visit” another congregation. Our Northern Great Lakes Synod website has a list of churches who feature services online. Visit https://www.nglsynod.org/covid-19/ to view the ever-growing list of possibilities.

These congregation are available via the Radio:

Bethany Lutheran Church, Escanaba: Radio broadcast at 10:45a on AM 600 and FM 93.5
Bethel Lutheran Church, Ishpeming: Radio broadcast on WJPD

We’ve included various resources in this mailing, too, including a “Worship in the Household” bulletin and two-weeks-worth of “Taking Faith Home” which gives daily Bible readings, prayers, and conversation starters.
While the doors to the church will be closed over these next few weeks, the work of the church will continue: newsletters, devotionals, online hymn sings, Member Roll Updates, phone check-ins, pre-planning for Summer/Fall, and other ideas that will inevitably spring to mind.

We are asking everyone to remain OUT of the actual buildings. We have deeply sanitized the space so that any trace of the virus has a chance to fully die-off. ANY entry into the building only increases the risk to everyone. Many of you have building keys, and enjoy easy access to our shared, Church spaces. We are asking your help in maintaining a healthy, social distance at this time. Social Distancing is just that: distancing. We must heed the warnings to keep this illness from spreading, and we ask for your help and cooperation in doing so.

Our secretaries may be working inside the Office during these weeks, but it our hope — our PRAYER — that they can continue to work in an isolated, safe, and uncompromised setting. While we usually encourage our members to go to the Office with any of their concerns, this is not the time for casual drop-ins or conversations. This is the time to call, e-mail, or text Pastor Brenda, Wendy, or Pete at the methods listed below.

The leadership of both Church Councils, in conversation with Pastor Brenda, continue to monitor County and State advisories, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) and the World Health Organization website (who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019). Please pray for all leaders in this time of uncharted waters.

We will continue to share any updated cancellations or postponements notice in the following ways:
- on the answering machines at both Gethsemane (788-4234) & St. Stephen’s (753-4932)
- on our Website, www.gsslutheran.org
- on the Facebook pages of each congregation, and
- on the Front Doors of both churches. (We won’t NAIL them to the doors as Luther did, but they will be on display!)

We continue to urge our entire community to adopt common-sense hygiene, appropriate to each person’s medical and health status, and to do all we can together to mitigate and minimize any chance for any needless spread of illness. Choosing to stay home from all outside activities/stores/public establishments might be the very best bet for your household, as well as limiting any visitor to your home at this time.

If you feel your blood pressure rising,
if you need us to drop off a gallon of milk 6ft from your front door,
if you just need to talk to someone, PLEASE reach out to us.
We are in this together, and God walks by our side. Pray. Hope. Trust.

In Christ, our Healer and Hope,
Rev. Brenda Greenwald – Pastor@gsslutheran.org – 720.989.8218
Wendy Hanson, Gethsemane Council President – WendyLuHanson@yahoo.com - (715) 923-1087
Pete Thoune, St. Stephen’s Council President - ppthoune@gmail.com - (906) 235-1787