

March 23, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill,

Our psalm this past Sunday in our online worship was Psalm 23. Scholars call it a “psalm of trust,” as the psalmist places confidence in God’s providence and protection. “The Lord is my shepherd,” we remembered. We cling to the psalm’s final promise – “and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”

That vision and promise is particularly profound for such a time as this, as the coronavirus pandemic continues, with infections and fatalities accelerating, and with no clear timeline for resolution in sight.

I hope you are well, as are those you love. We remain in continual prayer for all those affected, for all those responding, for all those making decisions, for all those dealing with this in some way.

And, we continue seeking ways to “be church” virtually, when the very thing we crave, connection, is unavailable to us physically.

We will continue to provide online worship, learning as we go, mastering more technology each time. Please join us at **10:00 a.m. on March 29 and April 5 (Palm Sunday)**. Those services will continue to be available after they debut. You can reach those from the top of the homepage at www.chestnuthillpres.org. Thanks especially to Brian for his technology leadership and to Leslie Lefer for coordinating much of our communications!

It seems likely – though it’s not been determined officially – that we will not be back in the Sanctuary for Easter. We are already planning Holy Week services that will have their own integrity and meaning.

And we are offering many other opportunities, with more in the works. We are trying to strike a balance between “enough” and “too much,” while making them technologically accessible. Some opportunities will be offered on Facebook Live, which you can access directly from www.chestnuthillpres.org.

Here is a schedule for the coming two weeks. Join us when you can, and invite friends to join us. You may view recorded events at our Facebook main page once they've happened.

- Sunday, March 22 – Worship at 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, March 24 – Theology on Tap at 7:30 p.m. – Stay tuned for details
- Wednesday, March 25 – Bible Study at 12:00 noon
- Friday, March 27 – Daily Prayer at 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, March 29 – Worship at 10:00 a.m.
- Wednesday, April 1 – Bible Study at 12:00 noon
- Friday, April 3 – Daily Prayer at 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, April 5 – Palm Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m.

PASTORAL CARE: Brian is connecting with many of our senior members. The Deacons continue to reach out to our members in vulnerable populations. In addition, members of our youth group will be making monthly calls. Thank you! If you would like to make calls or send notes, please do, and contact us for suggestions. If you have pastoral needs, or desire a call, or are aware of someone who does, please contact Brian, Austin or me.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: Austin has reached out to our families with children, who are particularly impacted by the cancellation of school. We are sending out weekly illustrated curriculum, offering online academic tutoring help should parents encounter frustration or obstacles, and making and mailing cards from our children to adults in the congregation. We will also post Bible stories read by our members and staff and lectionary-based artwork created by our children for our entire PCCH family to enjoy. In an attempt to remain connected, Austin will host an online Kids' Lunch Hour Zoom call on Fridays for PCCH children and church school teachers. Hopefully this space will allow the children to ask questions, to voice fears, to see each other's faces, and to reconnect with their church friends and trusted adults.

YOUTH: Theology and Pretzels, the High School Youth Group and the Confirmation Class will continue to meet regularly online, to stay connected and supportive. This will include conversations, watch parties and other opportunities. You will eventually be able to see versions of some of those experiences. We are currently evaluating the timing of Confirmation Class as well as looking at the viability of the summer Mission Trip to Northern Ireland.

PCCH PRESCHOOL: School is on hiatus, of course, as are most of the schools in our region. Carla is in regular communication with staff and our families. You are welcome to watch a nightly story, shared anytime from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., at the preschool’s Facebook page (“PCCH Preschool”). This is a fun way for children and families to stay connected.

CENTER ON THE HILL: The Center’s programming is also postponed. Mariangela has invited many of the Center’s instructors to provide recorded content on a YouTube channel, and they have willingly obliged! You can find those offerings at the Center’s Facebook page (“[Center on the Hill, The Place for Active Adults](#)”). Also visit the Center’s programs page at <https://www.chestnuthillpres.org/center-on-the-hill/programs/> to find information and links to the YouTube page and Facebook, and other content links for those who might not use Facebook.

SOCIAL WITNESS: The Social Witness Committee is in communication with our mission partners – particularly PIHN, Face to Face, Germantown Avenue Crisis Ministry and West Kensington Ministry – to assess their needs. Since many of these programs provide direct services, their operations have been severely constrained; therefore our neighbors with greatest need are facing heightened challenges. As soon as hands-on volunteer opportunities return, we will let you know. In the meantime, keep these programs in your prayers, and consider a financial gift to them as you are able (let us know if you need contact information).

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES: We are in the process of pulling together a menu of new opportunities, some of which will happen in this “wilderness” time and some which may become more permanent fixtures. These include the book and movie club, Lenten retreat, virtual “coffee hour,” small “age and stage” conversation groups, prayer opportunities, a virtual “coffee house” with artistic performances, viewing parties, and more. Keep watch at our website and Facebook page, as well as regular emails to the congregation.

FINANCES: Finally, a word about finances. PCCH remains a healthy organization, supported generously by its members. The Session and its Personnel Committee are committed to compensating our gifted staff through this period. That can happen, in large part, because of your financial support. As you are able, please maintain your pledges. You may send them to the church via the mail, or make an electronic gift through the “Financial Support” button on our website’s homepage.

At same time, we know this period is producing its share of anxiety about many things, including financial. We are mindful that some of you are facing reduced hours and uncertain employment situations. We are in this together, and are grateful for whatever response you can make. Please don't allow this to add to whatever uncertainty you are facing.

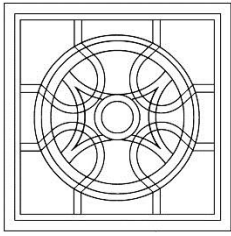
Additionally, your Investment Committee held a video meeting Friday and is in regular communication to monitor our portfolio. We have an astute and experienced group who has established a wise strategy that includes averaging three years of results, "flattening" (to use a current term!) performance so that our highs and lows level out. Having ended 2019 in solid shape, we are confident that the market will begin to stabilize over time. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to be in touch.

I remain grateful for a very gifted and dedicated staff whose faith and improvisational creativity will allow us to stay connected in meaningful ways. Keep them in your prayers, along with all of us – and particularly those who are vulnerable and directly affected by COVID-19.

Thanks to all of you for your commitments to the faith as it is lived out at the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill. May God the good shepherd continue to be present with us as we journey in the wilderness, until we, with all God's children, are welcomed home.

Faithfully,

John Wilkinson



March 20, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of PCCH,

I hope that you and yours are healthy and well. Let's continue to hold one another – and our world – in prayer as together we seek to navigate this uncharted territory.

Your Session and staff is working diligently (and remotely, practicing good distancing!) to determine ways we might move forward faithfully. We will send out a much more detailed correspondence on Monday with our plans.

In the meantime –

- Worship will happen **online** this coming **Sunday, March 22 at 10am**. To find us, simply go to www.chestnuthillpres.org and click the “Watch Live” button at the top of our homepage. Please let one of us know before Sunday if you are having problems.
- We will keep the building closed to worship, ministry programs, meetings and other activities until *at least* April 5 (including Palm Sunday).
- If you have prayer concerns of any kind, be in touch with Brian, Austin or myself. If you'd like to make some phone calls or write notes to some of our members, that would be great! Let us know.
- We are compensating our staff fully in this time. The ability to take that important step happens in large part by your continued financial support. You can mail your pledges and other contributions to the church office, or give online by visiting www.chestnuthillpres.org and clicking “Financial Support” on the homepage. Thank you for your support.

As I mentioned, we are pulling together a variety of online activities – prayer, study, fellowship, for all ages. We will send a more complete update at the beginning of the week.

In the meantime, keep in touch. Invite friends and family to join us Sunday for worship.

And keep praying – for a quick response to this virus, deliverance for those affected and all vulnerable populations, fortitude for all medical workers, wisdom for our governmental leaders, stamina for families with children at home, hope for those whose employment is precarious, and resources for all those already facing financial or physical hardship.

This Sunday, we will share Psalm 23 in worship. Its words are familiar, even iconic. And they are timely – perhaps they can provide both comfort and a mandate as we seek to be church for such a time as this.

Psalm 23 (NRSV)

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths^l

for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

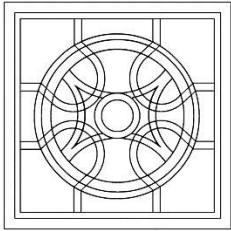
all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

Faithfully,

John



March 12, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of PCCH,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...”

~Psalm 46:1

With you, the Session and church staff have been monitoring the Coronavirus/COVID-19 news closely, both the health developments and the growing wave of church, school, business and sports cancellations. We have spoken with church and medical colleagues locally and across the country about their responses. Things are very fluid, and news seems to be unfolding in real time.

No one directly affiliated with PCCH has been, to the best of our knowledge, infected with COVID-19. Nonetheless, and because of our deep concern for the well-being of our church and community, *we have decided to cancel in person worship for the next two Sundays, March 15 and 22*, and all activities in the building during that time. We will continue to assess the situation as we look to a longer term plan.

Cancelling worship goes against our instincts, of course, yet after extensive discussion, we believe it to be the wise course of action now. While we would do everything we can to minimize the threat, including adapting worship and sanitizing and deep cleaning, medical professionals strongly suggest that the practices of “social distancing” are particularly apt for a church community.

For the next two Sundays, we will offer a worship experience via Facebook Live. Simply log onto https://www.facebook.com/PCChestnutHill/?epa=SEARCH_BOX at 10:00 a.m. This Sunday will include prayers, scripture readings and a brief devotional; we will offer something more expansive for March 22.

Again, this was not an easy decision, but we collectively feel that it is the wise one. Simply put, canceling worship removes risk and is a good act of pastoral care. As one friend said to me, “Jesus cared about the health of the community,” and this is one way to demonstrate that commitment.

Next week we will update you on our plans. Please check the church website and Facebook pages and your email for these updates.

As we continue on this “unique” Lenten journey, please remember to check on neighbors, friends, and church members. Let us know of any pastoral concerns. You can reach staff members through their emails and the office phone.

Finally, even though we are not gathering in person, it would be helpful to our ministry if you can maintain your pledge support via the mail or electronically. Thank you for your prayerful and thoughtful support as we move through this uncharted territory. Please pray especially for those affected by the virus and all those providing care.

Faithfully,

John Wilkinson