

Beloved of College UMC—

Greetings to you and all you love and care for and hold dear this day.

I know these are anxious times for all of us as we worry about the impact Coronavirus is having in the United States and around the world – and the ways it will likely continue affect us in the weeks to come. I led worship today heartened by those souls who felt comfortable enough to come to worship – but frankly, I am especially grateful for those of our congregation who made the best choice for themselves and were not with us in presence. Despite their absence, we knew they were with us in spirit – and if you were one of those unable to be present today, please know we held you in prayer.

I shared with the congregation today that, out of an abundance of caution, we are temporarily modifying some of our worship practices in effort to mitigate the possibility that germs could pass from one to another. Many of us made sure to express our welcome and greeting to each other without shaking a hand but with a wave or a smile or even an “elbow bump.” We did not pass the offering plates around the sanctuary at offering time, but instead received offering as folks exited the sanctuary at the end of worship. And, for a time, we have dispensed with offering Holy Communion during worship. Rather, located in baskets at the altar are factory-sealed pre-portioned cups of juice and a soft wafer – some of you are familiar with these as we often utilize these in bringing Communion to homebound folks and those who reside in care facilities. Many in attendance took those communion elements with them today. Those baskets remain available in the sanctuary and I invite you to stop by the church at any time it’s open throughout the week, and partake of Communion on your own - whether in prayer in the sanctuary, or to take home for use in your own devotional practice. I was overjoyed that some of our congregation took several communion elements with them to share with others.

Many of you are aware that there were a great many churches in St. Charles and St. Louis County who did not hold worship services today due to Coronavirus fears, and offered their church family an opportunity to hear their pastor’s message online. We do not possess the infrastructure yet to make streaming worship services possible, but I am exploring creative ways that I might be able to connect online – via our website and/or Facebook – with those who are unable to attend worship.

Several have asked me what the future holds in terms of our continuing to keep our doors open for Sunday worship and other church and community events held here throughout the week. And the honest answer is, “I don’t know.” I promise you that I will be listening to our public health officials, seeking the counsel of members of our leadership team, and being guided by Bishop Bob Farr as to whether it is appropriate to continue as we are, or close our doors for a period of time. Bishop Farr noted in a letter sent to all pastors on Friday that a great many bishops of other Conferences have mandated their churches close as a matter of public health concern – but that he was not making such a declaration at this time. Should circumstances change and closure become the wisest course, we will, of course, do exactly that in order to protect one another.

In the meantime, I long to stay connected to you – all of you – but especially those of our congregation who are most vulnerable. I am honored to be your pastor, and I invite your calls, text messages, and emails any time. I will be a safe place should you need simply to talk and feel supported and prayed for. Please note: a quirk of technology at College UMC is that my private voicemail via the church phone number is only accessible when I am in my office (in other words, I cannot access it remotely).

So I would always invite you to use my cell phone as the most direct way to reach me anytime: (660) 888-9457. In addition to ericmoore@collegemethodist.org, you can sometimes reach me quicker at ericmooreumc@gmail.com.

I have enclosed the script of my sermon that I preached on March 15 below for any who were unable to be present in worship and would like to receive it. You can scroll below to find it.

May our prayers be with each other, with those most vulnerable in our community, with first responders and hospital personnel and doctors and nurses and police officers, with those who haul away our trash, with those who work in service industries, with city and school administrators, with the clerks at the stores who bear the brunt of anxious frustration for lack of toilet paper and eggs and so much else, and all those who are sick or afraid this day. Indeed, these are anxious times – but we remember the One from whom all hope flows. And as Bishop Farr reminds us to not worry about what we cannot control: “The role of the Savior has already been filled.”

Blessings be upon you, your loved ones, and all our neighbors.
Pastor Eric