

To the People of Maize Manor United Methodist Church,

We are living in an uncertain time. The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has now reached the United States in force. States and businesses are beginning to take aggressive action to slow the spread of this virus, in order to prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed and to protect the most vulnerable people among us. We see the effects of these decisions from the NBA postponing their season to the closing of Disney World. Here in Ohio, local schools will be closed for almost three weeks, and possibly longer. The purpose of these shutdowns is to make our local communities as safe as possible in the months to come.

In Luke 12:22, Jesus says, "Do not worry".

This simple idea has long been one of my favorite expressions in the Bible. It is also a teaching I have a hard time following. I believe there is a constant temptation to worry about our lives, and that our sense of anxiety can often be a barrier to faith and faithful action.

With that said, it has been my experience that God's Kingdom is often better served by us seeking to live faithfully than it is by us sitting around brooding about our anxieties. As the Serenity Prayer states: "Lord, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." In this time of uncertainty, there are things we CAN control, including the decisions we make as a faith community in how to respond to the current pandemic. As a church, under normal circumstances, we would expect to have around 700-800 different people on site over the next few weeks, due to the combination of our Sunday Worship and our Community Events. That is a lot of people whose lives we can affect by being proactive in our response to COVID-19! With that in mind, I met with our Administrative Council to develop a strategy for what we will do to protect our church, our loved ones and our community:

- **Saturday, March 14**
 - This Saturday's Maize Manor Market will be OPEN. People need food, particularly in times of crisis. For the safety of our volunteers and the community, we are going to do it as a "drive-thru" market. People will stay in their vehicles to be registered, and we will bring their food right up to their vehicle. This will keep our volunteers outside and minimize all contact. Some of our regular volunteers are high risk individuals, so we want to encourage them to stay home. This means we may be shorthanded, so I would like to encourage anyone in the church who is not high risk to consider volunteering. We are going to CLOSE the Walk-in Closet, because it brings too many people into a small space.
- **Sunday, March 15 - Sunday, March 29**
 - All Face-to-Face Church Ministries will be CLOSED. Yes, even worship.

Obviously, the decision to close all of our in-person ministries is not something we took lightly. But we believe that as leaders it is our responsibility to do our part, and we do not want to put any of our church members, family members or community members in harm's way. As we approach March 29, we will reassess the situation on the ground to see if it is responsible to

reopen our ministries. In the meantime, we are working on ways to strengthen our Christian community through remote ministries.

WHAT WE WILL DO: Our Care Team is going to double the phone calls we make to our elder/sick members to keep in even closer contact with them during this time. We have also added 55 new names to our regular list to check in on, so we can keep close tabs on anyone we are concerned about.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Make a list of 10 people you know in the church, and call them regularly. Many people are living in fear and/or isolation right now, but we can all support each other.

WHAT WE WILL DO: I am exploring ways to interact with people through Social Media. As many of you know, I have not been a big Social Media user... But I am going to miss having contact with the people of the church, so this seems to be a good time to learn. I plan to start with my Facebook page. Technology can provide us ways to stay in touch with each other, share prayers and give each other strength.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: If you are like me and not a big user of Social Media, consider giving it a try. If you are already an avid Social Media user, make sure to check in with church folks, family and friends often to see how everyone is doing. Also, if you have a habit of posting negative things on Social Media, think about giving that up for Lent - I don't think most people need more negativity in their lives right now.

WHAT WE WILL DO: Our preschool plans to use the time while the children are out of school to thoroughly clean their entire space.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Practice good hygiene and take care of yourself. Don't take unnecessary risks.

And, finally, we have developed a plan for how to make it possible for you to participate in worship from your homes. Each Sunday, we will have a small crew of people who will lead worship with songs, readings, prayers, and a sermon. There are two ways you can participate:

1. Teleconference Call Instructions:
 - a. You can listen to worship on your home phone or cell phone!
 - b. During your normal worship time, just call +1 470-228-8203 (PIN: 751912844)
2. Online Instructions:
 - a. You need a facebook account to watch the livestream, but it's easy to make one. Just go to facebook.com and follow the prompts to create one.
 - b. We will start live-streaming about 5 minutes before worship begins. So at 9:30 or 11:00 just sign into your facebook account on your laptop or PC, then search for "Maize Manor United Methodist Church."
 - c. When you get to the church page, a picture of the livestream will appear - just hit the PLAY button and enjoy!

As you may or may not be aware, the majority of our income comes through Sunday giving. It puts the church in a difficult financial spot to cancel Sunday gatherings. But we believe your health is more important than our budget. For those of you who would like to continue

supporting the church during this time, I would like to invite you to consider writing weekly checks to mail in, or to give online through the church website.

For questions or updates, you can still call the Church Office at 614-267-4939, check our website at maizemanorumc.org, or follow us on Facebook.

I look forward to the day when we all gather together again face-to-face. Between now and then... Do not worry. Change the things you can. And, may the God of Peace be with you.

Pastor Ryan Grace