

Journeying Together

Shalom Mennonite Church

March 26, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each and every one of us in many different ways, but the most common experience is that we are all being asked to avoid physical contact with others as much as possible. The leadership at Shalom urges the congregation to follow this policy of “social distancing,” AND we encourage you to make an extra effort to stay in virtual contact with each other as much as possible while the “Stay at Home” directive is in effect. We have begun creating new opportunities for non-physical connections within the congregation and would like to update you about these developments:

- The church is purchasing a membership to zoom, which is a tool that allows people to participate in video conferences similar to Skype or FaceTime, except on a bigger scale with larger groups of people. We will make this available to all small groups and commissions that want to use it to meet.

- We encourage all of the small groups to stay connected through zoom or other means, and we would like to create additional small groups for anyone who is not attending one and who would like to join one during the outbreak. If you would like to join one, please email Brian Bither, Herb Troyer, Linda Kandel, or Rose Love and let them know what times in the day and in the week you would be available. There are ways to integrate even those who do not have internet access.

- We are also creating a telephone tree that we invite you to join. If you would like to be a part of the telephone tree, you will be given the name and phone number of a new person from the congregation to call at your convenience each week, and another person will be given your name and contact information. This is designed to facilitate broader connections than the handful of people with whom we meet in small groups. Please email Brian, Herb, Linda, or Rose if you are interested.

- We are in the early stages of developing some kind of church-wide gathering in which every member will be invited to participate. This will not be a Sunday morning worship service - we encourage you to participate in the virtual services of other churches at this time - but it may involve some “Community Prayer and Sharing.”

- We are developing a deacon system of pastoral care, in which every person will be assigned a deacon who will check in on them during the outbreak. Each individual will be welcome to share as much or as little with their deacon as they want, but the opportunity will be there. After the outbreak has ended, we will take the time to discern as a congregation whether we want this to be a permanent feature of our church life. For now, it is a provisional measure we are taking to make sure every person in our church is cared for.

More than ever, we encourage you to make it a discipline to read JT to learn what is going on with the church and stay spiritually connected.

WORSHIP

Our relationship with God
Chair: Linda Showalter

Reflection for the Journey

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything that most of us have ever experienced before. Life as we know it has come to a screeching halt, and no one knows when things will get “back to normal.” The physical, mental, social, and economic challenges we face are big, and they are made all the more stressful due to the fact that we don’t know how long we will have to endure them. This is new for us, but it is not a new experience historically for the people of God.

Many of the Biblical stories were written in contexts that we really could not relate to - until now. The Israelites wandered in the desert wondering if they would have enough food to get through each day, tempted to hoard more than they really needed. The people of Jerusalem were besieged by the Assyrian army with no sense of how long they would be "locked in" without any good options for dealing with it. There was no known cure for the leprosy of the people in Jesus' day who contracted it - the best they could do was to isolate from everyone else to avoid spreading it.

Therefore, the wisdom of the Bible becomes all the more relevant as we find our way in this new reality - especially Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer: give us this day our daily bread. When you don't know what the future holds, you have to live life one day at a time. Fortunately, God promises to meet us where we are each day, to guide us through the next step, and to remind us that even now, She still holds the world in Her hands.

So I encourage you to find some spiritual discipline that can sustain you daily through this time. This could be a discipline of gratitude - thanking God for the gifts of each day; of solitude (if you are in close quarters with other people) by locking yourself in a closet or going on a walk for a few minutes of prayer when it is safe to do so; of solidarity (if you are alone) of joining a partner on the phone of praying over the news each day, of meditation or study on the psalms or lamentations, or on any of the other spiritual disciplines you have learned about or discovered.

Take heart! Although we live in a time of uncertainty, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, and the God of all ages can get us through this, one day at a time.

Lenten Resources

During the 6 weeks of Lent, there will be a new, weekly Lenten meditation guide attached in each Journeying Together. These Lenten meditations will guide us to pray using scriptures and will focus on how Jesus brings light into the shadow places of our lives and our world. The meditations will challenge us to seek and to shine light, finding hope in desperate times. There will be many prayer options suggested and you will likely not use each one listed. The meditation guides encourage us to be

open to different ways of praying and where it can lead us. (see attached for Week Five, to start on Sunday, March 29th)

Resources from IN-MI Conference

We wanted to create a place where you could have easy access to resources that others in IMMC have found helpful and where you can share resources with one another.

There is a new page on the IMMC website. On it you will find articles, tips, and videos that we hope will aid you in the good work you are already doing. Additionally, we are listing the congregations who are offering services online. Here is the

link: <https://im.mennonite.net/responding-to-covid-19/>

ADMINISTRATION

Congregational support systems

Chair: Laura Harms

Seeking Administration Asst.

During this time of closures and cancellations, Brian will take up some of the administrative tasks. AC would still very much like to hire a new Administrative Assistant. Please spread the word so we'll be ready to relieve Brian of these administrative duties in the near future. If anyone is looking for some extra work-from-home income during this time, please reach out to Tim, Sam, or Laura. You could pick up some tasks like creating the newsletter, updating the website, and checking office email temporarily. Full job description attached.

VAT Minutes

The Vision and Accountability Team (VAT) met on March 23. The minutes are attached to the newsletter email and can be found [here](#).

Pastor:

Brian Bither, (317) 322-7320;
brian@shalommennonite.com;

Vision & Accountability Team: Jeanne Smucker, Cheryl Martin, Wilma Bailey, Rod Maust, Thad Wilson, Brian Bither

Please submit information by Thursday, 12pm, to office@shalommennonite.com