

March 17, 2020

Happy Saint Patrick's Day!

Dear Friends and Members of Sterry Memorial Presbyterian Church,

Sadly I write to inform you of our Session of Elders' decision to suspend all Sterry meetings and events, including Sunday morning worship, until further notice. As recently as this past Friday, the Center for Disease Control was strongly recommending no gatherings of 250 people or more. And so Sterry gathered for worship, and while we were in the sanctuary, the CDC lowered 250 to 50! On Monday (yesterday) President Donald Trump soberly faced the nation and strongly recommended that we suspend any gatherings of 10 or more people.

The vast majority of churches in the USA have closed their doors to participate in the containment of coronavirus. Most schools have sent students home. Many businesses are requiring employees to work from home. The sooner all of us follow suit, the sooner we can contain the spread of the virus and return to normalcy. If we desire to be good neighbors then we don't have a choice to stay open. At this writing, there are no known cases of COVID-19 in Canyon County and only 5 cases in Idaho. By the time you are reading this letter, there will be more cases discovered. To date, less than 300 tests have been administered in Idaho. And so, it does not appear to many of us that there is any crisis, let alone a pandemic. But our community is not the norm by a long shot and if the virus does spread to our community we do not want to be part of the problem that led to the escalation of cases.

As difficult as this situation is, we should be grateful for the wisdom of our Session of Elders and national church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in America, for making this tough decision. Social distancing seems to go against everything the church promotes – fellowship, accountability, corporate worship, friendship, helping neighbors, traveling to mission projects...But infecting family, friends and neighbors also seems to go against what the church ought to do.

Sterry's Session of Elders and Deacons are hoping that you will join us in making the most of this crisis. Together we are going to find alternative ways and methods to keep our faith and practice alive. Today, as Sterry's Pastor, I am working to formulate a comprehensive plan to keep Sterry alive and fruitful during this season of quarantine. Expect more electronic and snail mail for our office, staff and officers. Expect more "asks" from our Deacons and Elders to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to help those in dire need during this crisis.

We will provide you with printed and electronic sources to aid you in worship and spiritual growth and service. Unlike many congregations, we will not be streaming live, mock worship services. We may post podcasts and videos that will aid you in worship and other components of the Christian life.

Sterry's Elders will enforce the suspension of our regular gatherings and manage the closure of the Sterry facility for the shortest season possible. We officers will evaluate and re-evaluate on a daily basis. Please pray with us toward a swift resolution of this crisis and also pray that much good and growth in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, will result in the midst of this crisis.

Immediately we need your help spreading this news and all subsequent and more positive news we will be dispensing to you on our email list. Not everyone who worships and serves alongside of us is on this list, and so we need your help to contact and include these people. Who are they? Simply spread this news and everything coming with others you know, who may have even the slightest connection to Sterry. Invite them to contact our Sterry office and supply us with contact information so that we may include them in all communications and supply of resources and opportunities.

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,

Pastor Nathan E. Lewis

for the Sterry Session