

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

After serious consideration of the very real health risk involved in public gatherings and in order to curb the spread of the Coronavirus, the Church Council of First English Evangelical Lutheran Church, of Mansfield, Ohio has voted, to suspend all Sunday Worship Services, and all non-essential meetings of Committees and Small Groups. This suspension will last through **Thursday, April 30, 2020.**

We want to acknowledge that this is a very fast-changing and dynamic time in which our plans can change quickly, from week to week and from day to day. Your Church Council will continue to assess the modify this decision as necessary. We will keep you posted. Please check the church's website for the most recent updates: **<https://www.felc-mansfield.org>**

As we are all aware, the global spread of the Coronavirus, COVID-19, is dramatically changing how we live our daily lives. In order to help stem the rapid spread of this virus in our society and “flatten the curve” of the peak number of those who will become infected, both President Donald Trump and Ohio Governor Mike Dewine issued public directives that impact all of us. Key to their directives was the emphasis that persons should avoid meetings for non-essential purposes, and that we should avoid any gathering of more than 10 people. Governor Dewine has now asked that there should not be gatherings of more than 3 persons and that they should carefully practice social distancing, staying at least 6 feet apart. Both our President and our Governor are issuing these directives to us based on the very best scientific research that is available.

Science has proven that participation in public gatherings significantly increases the risk of contagion. This poses a serious danger to those especially most vulnerable.

Maybe you have mixed feelings about not gathering for worship. I would share this information with you that I read on Pastor Greg Finke's blog from ***“Joining Jesus On His Mission!”***: <https://dwelling114.org/blog/2020/3/18/is-now-the-time-to-become-an-acts-8-church>

“The Church especially needs to take “social distancing” seriously to help slow the spread of the pandemic. Why? In South Korea, they have tracked 80% of their COVID-19 infections to one dear woman who went to church services twice within a few days. She thought she had a cold. This woman is known as Patient 31. Patient 31 had all the best of intentions when she went to church. But because she did not practice social distancing, she unintentionally led to 80% of South

Korea's COVID-19 infections. As of Monday, March 16, there were 8000+ COVID-19 cases and 75 deaths." (Information from Reuters)

All of us deeply regret that we will not be able to publicly worship together during these days. However, the safety of one another and of our larger society is paramount. Part of our Christian Witness is being good citizens, and this intentional "social distancing" is something that our leaders are calling all Americans to do. It is for our national health and security and the safety of the most vulnerable.

COVID-19 does not appear to be ending soon. Chances are, before it goes away, it will hit even closer to home. It is in many of our cities. Across the country, it is making its way into our churches. It may well enter some of our families and the lives of those we love. Therefore, let us Be Careful, Be Wise, and Be Practical in what we each do. But, let us NOT live in fear.

Rather than live in fear, let us together approach this challenge in Faith. We have an opportunity to model for our children and for our families and for each other what a Faith-filled and faithful response can be. Instead of living in panic and in fear, being reactionary and taking a self-centered response, we have a chance to remain rational and reasoned and to approach this pandemic in a spirit of trust.

Let us remember who we are and to Whom we belong. We are and always will be → **God's Easter People!** We are the Children of our Lord and of His Resurrection! Therefore, let the Church of Jesus Christ, commit ourselves to Him and to the power of prayer. *"More things are wrought through Prayer than this world dreams of!"*

Let us stay centered in the Promises & Power of Our Risen Lord Jesus and remember and remind one another that → Our God is Always Greater Still! ... Greater than all that this life might throw at us!

Yes, we should be concerned. And we must be responsible. But let us not be afraid! We Belong to JESUS!

**Together In The Love of Our Lord Jesus,
Pastor Paul L. Larson**

"... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (NIV)