

The Messenger

April 2020
Volume 34.4

St. John's
United Church of
Christ

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

**An Open and Affirming
Congregation**

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A Message from the Pastor



I sit here the week before Holy Week feeling totally overwhelmed, as I am sure you all are. Our world seems to be changing so fast. Physically distancing means not being with loved ones to share our thoughts, fears, and just plain everyday life. Some have been blessed by deep contact with loved ones via Zoom and phone, others are feeling just plain alone. Some are feeling the love, others are wondering if anything they have focused on matters.

Then I look at the story of that first Holy Week and the weeks that led to it and realize how our situation is in no way new. The disciples had walked with Jesus for three years. Going around preaching and sharing being a small band had been their normal, and they could see it coming to an end. We might hear Peter's cry to not go to Jerusalem differently in this time. Do not go to that place where you will be killed, for if you are killed what will I have left. Or maybe we will hear his denial differently this year, as he says three times he was not part of that group. Maybe this year we hear his fear in that denial in a new way.

What does it mean to want to serve and yet social distance? How do we manage safety and being advocates for those who are less fortunate than us, like the homeless, those in prisons and jails, or those who ICE is picking up, as we leave the streets? We hear of nurses and doctors being threatened to stay silent about the lack of supplies in hospitals. We hear rumor of a wall that is not needed being built while we are not looking. We see front-line workers, like shippers and grocery clerks, wanting protections that higher-wage workers have assumed, such as health care coverage. And we wonder how do we stand with people in a time when we can not physically be with.

This Holy Week, we walk into a new time with the disciples, and we can not see the next. We must stop and allow the death of what was so that the new can be born. The one assurance I can give you is that we will walk together, clumsily as we learn together new technology, but together we will live our call to create a new world that is more loving and just for all. For we are all beloved of God and have each been called to this time.

The Rev. Linda Higgins

A Message from the Council President



When Isaiah wrote "Behold, I will extend peace to her (Jerusalem) like a river and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream" the Israelites were in Babylon, in bondage under Cyrus the Great. The self same Cyrus who was the king of Persia, one of the largest kingdoms of the known world. Cyrus was determined to hold Jerusalem for himself and the Israelites as his slaves yet, Isaiah wrote of 'peace like a river', flowing over and around Israel, comforting them in the midst of everything they knew being ripped away from them.

Things kinda feel like that now. Things have been ripped away from us. We can't go like we are used to going, see who we used to seeing, buy what we are used to buying. Folks we love are in peril. Cyrus had the power of life and death over the Israelites just like Covid-19 has over us. Just like Cyrus controlled the coming and going of the Israelites, this disease has us frightened and held in place, separated from people we are used to and love.

Into our life comes these words "I will extend peace like a river". God didn't promise to save the Israelites but DID promise peace, if they believed and accepted it.

So here we are today. Will we? Can we? accept peace in the midst of all this uncertainty . God extends God's peace if we will accept it. We aren't promised a problem free, stress free life. But peace? Yes.

Let the peace of God's river flow over you washing away the fears and anxiety of the world. Be calm, be safe, know God's peace.

With much love,

Dreama

Council President



A Pastoral Letter in a Time of Pandemic

As leaders in our beloved United Church of Christ, we write to speak a word of tender care to our congregations, our clergy, and our members.

We are sensitive to the grief and loss that many of you are experiencing. Most of us have never seen anything like this. The pandemic has interrupted our lives. Some have suffered the premature death of loved ones, while others live through and with severe pain and suffering. People are losing their jobs. Many of us have been placed under orders not to leave our homes and to shelter in place. In most of our communities, orders have been given to limit gathering in public spaces. This has been hard for all of us.

As leaders, we also bear witness to acts of profound kindness and creative ingenuity that remind us of the better angels within us. We are watching a Church prove itself to be incredibly adaptable as orders to stay at home have not ended our collective need even in times like these to give our thanks to God. Churches who not only have never gathered in a digital community, but who never thought they would need or want to, are doing just that – and experiencing something very profound and very meaningful. We have heard stories of whole families, spread across the country, being able to gather together for the same worship service via digital broadcast. That is such a meaningful gift the church has to offer in a season such as this.

We grieve deeply with you the losses that we are all living with; but we also celebrate a body of Christ that can adapt quickly to meet the emerging need. It is our hope and prayer that what we are learning about ourselves – about our capacity for grace, for hope, for change, for love beyond our walls – will enrich us long after this pandemic ends.

We strongly encourage churches to suspend your traditional ways of gathering to worship. Gathering to worship in this moment places our loved ones at risk. On the website of the denomination you can find resources to help you create new ways to worship as a sequestered community. Our Conferences are regularly offering networking opportunities so that you can share creative ideas and practical learnings.

Remember that we are a Christmas people, and that Jesus is incarnated in every act of love and kindness we extend to one another.

Remember that we are an Easter people and we know that God can reach us beyond all the barriers the world can create.

Remember that we are a Pentecost people who know that the Holy Spirit can revive us and who will be our strength in times of great distress.

We can do this. We are the Church, the body of the risen Christ. As leaders called to serve you, we pledge to you that we will continue to draw on every resource available to us that will help you through this season.

In the love of our blessed Redeemer, we remain as always your humble servants and your beloved covenant partners.

Faithfully,

The Council of Conference Ministers

The Officers of the United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer

The Rev. Traci Blackmon

The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson

Holy Week Schedule



Palm Sunday

Worship begins at 10 a.m. via Zoom. Jesus' Palm Parade was a protest, so invite you to make your own protest sign. Whatever justice issue that is close to your heart. Sunday we will also take Communion. You are asked to pick both a bread to be blessed and a cup of something and bring it to the room that you will join in worshipping from.

Maundy Thursday

Worship begins at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom. Come to worship with your dinner to eat as well as both bread and drink to bless and a bowl of water to wash your hands.

Easter Sunday

Celebratory Worship begins at 10 a.m. via Zoom. We will be celebrating Easter as the first disciples did in the upper room probably feeling still unsure the good news in the mist of the loss we are feeling, but it will surely break in. It will also have some fun, so everyone is challenged to make a funky Easter hat. We will be able to see each other's creations as we worship together on Easter morning.

We will again be sharing in our virtual communion service. Please bring something to bless, bread, and cup to the room in which you will be worshipping.

Holy Week Virtual Prayer Walk

Pastor Linda is creating a slide show that will be a virtual prayer walk around Richmond which will be shared with you during Holy Week.

All meetings and worship conducted via Zoom can be accessed via:

- the Zoom application: <https://zoom.us/j/487361412>
- or by phone:
+1-646-558-8656
Meeting ID: 487 361 412

Mission and Outreach



Our mission of the month for April will be Feed More. Feed More collects, prepares, and distributes food to our neighbors through its programs and its network of agencies. One of these programs is Meals on Wheels. Now, more than ever, Feed More needs our support. Please participate this month with your donation.

At this time, you can mail your check to the church or [donate online](#). We urge you to continue to support St. John's and our community service providers. If you have any questions about our mission program please contact a member of our committee.

Marcie, Chris, Dreama, Terrie, Kathy, Terry, Charlie, David and Rick

Announcements



Do you need food?

As our opportunities for getting out of our homes are curtailed, some of us are turning to cooking activities, and some of us may be in need of additional food. Some time ago the Congregational Life and Care Committee had organized a frozen food bank in the freezer at church. In the current situation, it seems more efficient to respond to individuals' needs as they occur. If you are having trouble getting to the store, or would like to have some freshly-made food delivered, please contact Scott Siefert at sesiefert@gmail.com or (804) 350-0826. Likewise, if you are able to be "on-call" to respond to a need for food, also please let Scott know.

Financial Update

While Sunday services in the church building are suspended due to the public health emergency, most likely for the next several months, the work of St. John's continues. Pastor Linda is continuing to minister to the members of our congregation and prepare for Sunday and upcoming Holy Week services on the Zoom platform. Melissa McKenney, our Office Manager, is going to be working from home and continuing to maintain communications and office activities from there; you can leave messages for her at (804) 358-9291.

Payroll and bills for ongoing maintenance and operations need to continue to be paid. During this time, PLEASE do what you can to maintain your financial support for ongoing church activities. Checks can be mailed to the church at 503 Stuart Circle, Richmond, VA 23220. Your bank probably offers free online bill paying services that can be used for your St. John's donation. And you can [donate online](#) by credit card (with a small service fee paid by the church) or by direct debit/EFT with no charge, by going to the church website, <http://stjohnsrichmond.org>, clicking on the "TICKETS/EVENTS/DONATE" tab at the bottom of the home page, and then making a donation under "Church Operations/Pledged or General" or under "St. John's Missions".

As a reminder, April's Mission of the Month is Feed More, which collects, prepares and distributes food to those in need throughout the RVA region. If you have any questions about online giving or church finances, please contact Stewardship Chair Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887.

Announcements



RISC



In the interests of safety, Nehemiah Action Assembly, scheduled for April 27, has been canceled. If you have invited anyone to the Action, please let them know that it will not be happening this year. They are likely also changing the date for the Celebration. The tentative date is Monday, June 15th, but this is subject to change in light of the evolving circumstances.

As soon as it is safe to gather in large numbers again, RISC will be taking direct action on Gun Violence and Housing & Evictions. The tentative plan right now is to start off the night of Celebration with a Mini-Action around Gun Violence, and to conduct a series of Mini-Actions on Housing & Evictions later in the summer with Richmond's Mayor and City Council members. Affordable housing will only be more of a crisis when this is all over, and in the increased hopelessness and despair that far too many will be facing, violence will be a likely resort. We will keep you updated as plans develop.

Making Medical Masks



For those who sew, making medical masks for hospitals, nursing homes, etc. is a great way to contribute to the community. There are multiple groups coordinating this effort, and patterns available online. Approved patterns and coordination of local efforts can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RVAmasks4health/>

Community Resources



Unemployment Insurance

If you are totally or partially unemployed and wish to apply for benefits, complete an on-line application at www.vec.virginia.gov or call the VEC Customer Contact Center at 1-866-832-2363 (Available 8:15am to 4:30pm, Monday - Friday.). The Governor has suspended the one week waiting period and the job search requirements. Eligibility has been expanded to include part-time workers, self-employed, free-lancers, gig workers, etc., and the federal stimulus package has increased benefit amounts.

Medical Insurance While Unemployed

If you have lost health care coverage due to becoming unemployed, there are a number of options you can explore. NBC12 has compiled a thorough list here:

<https://www.nbc12.com/2020/03/27/health-insurance-options-available-laid-off-employees-lost-health-insurance-benefits/>

Eviction and Utilities

The Supreme Court of Virginia declared a judicial emergency on March 16th that suspends all non-essential, non-emergency court proceedings through April 6, 2020, which includes new evictions. Also on March 16th, the State Corporation Commission ordered utilities to suspend service disconnections for 60 days. It is unlawful for landlords to change locks or cut off utilities without a court order. For legal help, call the Virginia Poverty Law Center hotline 1-833-NoEvict (663-8428).

2-1-1 Virginia

2-1-1 VIRGINIA is a service of the Virginia Department of Social Services provided in partnership with the Council of Community Services, The Planning Council, the United Way of Central Virginia, and the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg.

2-1-1 VIRGINIA provides access to services in your community and statewide. All referrals are confidential and you can search for these same services on the 2-1-1 VIRGINIA Web site at <https://www.211virginia.org/> or by dialing 2-1-1.

Zoom Tutorials

Remote Worship:

While church is closed to limit the spread of COVID-19, we will be gathering for worship remotely. Participation can be done by telephone, computer, or smartphone using a platform called Zoom.

To participate by **computer** or **smartphone**, which provide the *option* of sharing video, use the following link: <https://zoom.us/j/487361412>

To join by **telephone** for *audio only*, dial 1-646-558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 487 361 412 when prompted. Note: This works for both land lines and cellular phones.

Technical Support for Zoom:

For smartphone and computer users, we recommend that you try the link above in advance of joining Sunday's service to leave time to download the necessary software and to adjust your personal settings. If you have any trouble with connecting via computer or smartphone on Sunday and don't have time to troubleshoot, calling in by phone is a great backup plan and can be done quickly.

Please see the links below for additional information guidance for those new to using the platform.

Video tutorial for joining by computer:

https://www.youtube.com/embed/hIkCmbvAHQQ?rel=0&autoplay=1&cc_load_policy=1

Video tutorial for computer video and audio settings:

https://www.youtube.com/embed/-s76QHshQnY?rel=0&autoplay=1&cc_load_policy=1

Android phone tutorial:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200942759-Getting-Started-with-Android>

iOS tutorial, including iPhones and iPads:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362993-Getting-Started-with-iOS>

United States® Census 2020

Have you completed your 2020 Census form? It's easy!

A complete count is critical to ensuring funding for your community & representation. Check your mailbox & fill it out:

- By mail
- Online <http://2020census.gov>
- By phone in English 1-844-330-2020
- Por tel. en español 1-844-468-2020

April 2020

<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thu</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>
			1	2	3	4
5 Palm Sunday Worship via Zoom 10 a.m.	6	7 Renovations Meeting 3 p.m.	8	9 Maundy Thursday Worship via Zoom 6 p.m.	10	11
12 EASTER Worship via Zoom 10 a.m.	13 Church Council Meeting 6:30 pm	14 Renovations Meeting 3 p.m.	15	16	17	18
19 Worship via Zoom 10 a.m.	20	21 Renovations Meeting 3 p.m.	22	23	24	25
26 Worship via Zoom 10 a.m.	27	28 Renovations Meeting 3 p.m.	29	30		

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<https://zoom.us/j/487361412>
- or by phone:
+1-646-558-8656
Meeting ID: 487 361 412



- 2 Dale Totty
- 20 Charlotte Ford
- 23 Huldah Anderson
- 30 Betsy Bighinatti