

To the FPC Congregation:

Pastor Kirk has asked me, as a practicing physician and active church member, if I would help to advise the congregation and church leaders about our church's response to the novel coronavirus. Fear and anxiety about diseases can lead to unnecessary panic and worry. Help to stop stigma related to COVID-19 by knowing the facts.

The news is filled with information (and some misinformation) regarding COVID-19. COVID-19 is the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. The circumstances faced by the world and US health officials are evolving daily. To quote the CDC, "Guidance is based on the currently limited information available about coronavirus disease 2019 regarding disease severity, transmission efficiency and shedding duration. The approach will be refined and updated as more information becomes available and as response needs change in the United States."

Corona viruses are a group of infectious germs that can cause illness ranging in severity from the common cold to the serious SARS infection of 2002. The novel virus is a new infectious disease to the human population, most likely having mutated from an animal virus. The virus spreads similar to the common cold and influenza by respiratory droplets from coughing and sneezing, and contact with contaminated surfaces when the virus particles are introduced into the body by touching mouth/nose/eyes. Those most affected by the virus are persons with chronic medical conditions (pulmonary diseases like COPD and asthma, diabetes and heart disease), immune compromise, and advanced age.

Until more becomes known and the situation changes, here are some steps to take.

FPC's Response:

1. For now, we will continue our scheduled group activities and services. Check the website for updates if cancellations become necessary.
2. Communion will continue in the same manner as always with individual bread pieces dipped into the wine. For immune compromised individuals, there will be a separate plate available with the bread and wine.
3. On Monday and Friday mornings, our regular cleaning routine includes: wiping-down tabletops, stairway handrails and entrance door handles with a disinfectant solution.
4. Two hand sanitizer containers are in each pew hymnal rack. We ask that when a container is empty you place it on the seat of the pew to be replaced. Larger hand sanitizer containers are placed in classrooms and around the building.
5. Two free-standing hand sanitizer "non-touch" dispensers are located on the main level near the east and south entrances. The hand soaps in the restrooms all contain the typical hand soap disinfectant.

6. Office staff have access to Clorox type wipes; due to the nature of the product and shelf-life they are not located freely around the building.

Your Response:

1. It will be helpful for all members to wash hands frequently, especially before congregational gatherings. The best hand washing technique uses soap and water and lasts for at least 20 seconds with your hands under water. Hand washing is preferable to hand sanitizer to prevent infectious disease spread but hand sanitizer is available if hand washing is not.
2. Please exercise cough etiquette. It is best to cough into a tissue and immediately throw it away.
3. If you are ill with fever and cough, please remain at home. Keep your distance from others (virus transmission is likely within 6 feet). Limit contact with pets and animals. If you feel you need to be seen by a healthcare provider, call ahead. You may be asked some screening questions, and this will help the healthcare providers office take steps to limit exposure.
4. If you fall into the category of high-risk individuals, consider avoiding large groups settings in which the risk of transmission is higher.
5. Consider wearing a facemask if you are sick. Healthy individuals do not need facemasks.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has a website that is updated daily and has a wealth of information regarding COVID-19.

The church staff is available to offer social support to affected individuals and we encourage all members to reach out to those who may be worried about this illness or who have friends and relatives in affected regions.

Maribeth H. Baker, MD
Church Member