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## **Pastoral Message Coronavirus (2019-nCov) and Worship**

Dear friends at Grace,

Worship on Sunday is a central part of our faith life together. We gather in community to be reminded of God's love. We hear the Word, pray together, sing together and receive the Meal of Holy Communion. We depart strengthened and renewed.

As reports of the spread of the coronavirus (2019-nCov) increase each day, including growing concerns in Westchester County, many among us are experiencing anxiety about how we can best protect ourselves and loved ones. These feelings of anxiety are causing many to consider whether gatherings of people – including worship – should be avoided. At this time, guidance from the NY State, Westchester County and our Church lead me to believe that we should not become overly worried about gatherings like worship. However, in order to help ensure that we all feel properly safeguarded, I made the following suggestions (most of them just common sense) to the church council who supported my sharing them with you:

- If you are not feeling well, if your health is already compromised, or if you have a FEVER, PLEASE DO NOT COME TO WORSHIP. But, please do call my cell phone – 917-923-9520 or email me [pastor@gracelutheranscarsdale.org](mailto:pastor@gracelutheranscarsdale.org). We will want to pray for you and keep in contact. This is a community that cares for each other, so keep in touch if you are not able to come to worship.
- While life in community is marked by great affection for one another, please avoid unnecessary physical contact with one another to help avoid the spread of germs. Whether greeting one another when entering worship, sharing the Peace, or enjoying fellowship during coffee time, a simple wave “hello”, a bow of the head are sufficient means of sharing the peace. I will also teach the American sign language for Peace to be used in worship. If someone chooses not to shake your hand or hug, don't take offense or take it personally. They are likely only trying to maintain some personal space for everyone's health.
- There is much anxiety around worship these days concerning the practices related to Holy Communion. After consultation with many and in communication with council, I have decided that for the next four weeks we will not use the process of intinction (dipping the bread), but rather have individual disposable plastic glasses of wine and grape juice. Also, all who prepare and distribute the communion elements will use proper hand washing and hand sanitizer as they normally would to support the health of the community. I believe this provides the needed safety at this time and we will evaluate our communion practices as additional information is learned about the coronavirus. If, however, you are uncomfortable

receiving communion during this time, I do invite you to still participate by coming forward for a blessing. While normally I would mark your forehead with the sign of a cross, I will for the next few weeks, just hold my hand above your head while offering a blessing.

With these commonsense practices, I hope that you will all continue to feel comfortable gathering for worship. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and if any further measures become necessary, we will respond appropriately. I have begun to research how to do “live streaming” on face book, so that if NY State or Westchester County prohibit group gatherings, I will still offer worship on our facebook page at 10 am on Sundays. Stay tuned as I learn more.

With regards to other events and activities beyond worship, we are NOT at this time cancelling anything. Holy Communion Classes, Church Clean-up Day, AA meetings and Creative Playtime will continue to function normally. The parents of Creative Playtime are receiving a letter from Julia Mord – president of the school board, Gigi Aronoff – director of Creative Playtime and myself that outlines the appropriate precautions being implemented by the teachers and school. We have reviewed our policies and believe we can continue to provide a safe healthy place to care for the children of Creative Play time. We will of course continue to monitor the situation and if the Eastchester Schools are closed, we will close Creative Playtime. But for now, we look forward to celebration the creativity of the school children at the Art Show on Friday night – March 6 at 7 pm. Come and join us – see the robots and all their other art.

Gathering together in community is life giving. God created us to not be alone, but to be in community together. Accurate and timely information can also be life giving and helpful in times of anxiety. So, below I have provided a number of links to trusted sources of information, including a Pastoral Message from our Synod Bishop Paul Egersteiner. I look forward to gathering in worship on Sunday to pray for those who are sick and support each other in good health. Don't forget to change your clocks or you will be late for worship and just in time to help with clean-up day.

Peace,  
Pastor Ann Tiemeyer

### **Additional Information and Resources**

Pastoral Letter from Bishop Paul Egensteiner  
<https://www.mnys.org/a-pastoral-letter-concerning-the-coronavirus/>

Resource Page from Metropolitan New York Synod  
<https://www.mnys.org/about/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Resource Page from ELCA regarding worship  
[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Worship\\_in\\_Times\\_of\\_Public\\_Health\\_Concerns.pdf?\\_ga=2.92323288.47142085.1583361228-1899726542.1513268338](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Worship_in_Times_of_Public_Health_Concerns.pdf?_ga=2.92323288.47142085.1583361228-1899726542.1513268338)

CDC's dedicated 2019-nCoV website  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nCoV>

NYSDOH's dedicated 2019-nCoV website

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

NYSDOH directory of local health departments

[https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/)

New York State Center for School Health website

[www.schoolhealthny.com](http://www.schoolhealthny.com)

Westchester County Resource Page

<https://health.westchestergov.com/2019-novel-coronavirus>

