



March 16, 2020

Dear Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church Family,

I am contacting you because our whole community—along with the rest of the world—is facing a serious health crisis. As people of faith, who are called by God to care for our neighbors, we need to respond to make sure that we are taking care of everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us. As people of serious mind, we need to act based upon the rapidly changing (but still sound) scientific information and the recommendations of health experts who are trying to manage the situation.

Therefore, in light of the fact that

- the World Health Organization has officially declared the spread of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) infections a global pandemic,
- Governor Gavin Newsom has issued a statewide order to prohibit any gatherings of 250 or more persons and, additionally, strongly urged holding no meetings with 10 or more persons over the age of 50 years,
- the Public Health Department of Santa Clara County has issued a ban on mass public gatherings and has strongly urged canceling large community events,
- our area (Santa Clara County) is one of the areas with the highest concentrations of coronavirus infections and community transmission has been confirmed,
- our community skews heavily toward the “at risk” population (persons over 50 years of age), and
- one of the explicit “Great Ends” of the Church universal is “the **shelter, nurture,** and spiritual fellowship of the children of God” (emphasis added),

the session of Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church has decided to cancel all large church gatherings, including worship, starting Friday, **March 13**, through at least **April 11**. We will do our best to keep updating you about when regular services will resume, when local and national advisories indicate that it is safe to do so. This decision was made at an emergency session meeting that took place on Thursday, March 12, at 5 p.m. via videoconference.

If you have questions about particular activities, meetings, or gatherings, please contact the event organizer.

I realize that what is being proposed might seem extreme to some. Please understand that this decision was made after careful deliberation, with the goal of protecting the most vulnerable members of our SVPC community, and in hopes that our church can help in local, state, and national efforts to address the pandemic.

Rooted in Christ, Reaching out in Love

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Here are some resources for you to read and think about, that have informed the thinking of our leadership:

[Santa Clara County Public Health Advisory](#)

[County of Santa Clara Public Health Department Advisory](#)

[CDC Recommendations for 30 day Mitigation Strategies for Santa Clara County](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Update and Thorough Guidance](#)

[California Governor's Office of Emergency Services – Gov. Newsom Issues New Executive Order](#)

[New York Times article, "Kentucky Asks Churches to Cancel Services as the Coronavirus Spreads"](#)

[New York Times article, "God vs. Coronavirus"](#)

Some additional thoughts I would like to share:

I believe that our worship and community fellowship activities are not just at the heart of what we do as a church, they are also essential parts of how we enact our relationship with God and how we sustain one another as created beings. They have real value and they provide great benefit to those who participate. The cancellation or suspension these activities (even if we provide online or virtual alternatives) will be a genuine loss for all of us, with their own negative impacts. So, we do not make this decision lightly—but I do believe it is the right decision (however unfortunate it might be) for this present time.

We also know that you will have to live and move in other spaces during the weeks that we are not meeting together as a church community. Please follow best practices for addressing the health crisis in all spaces: keep washing and sanitizing hands, removing yourselves from public spaces if you are not feeling well, refraining from touching one another or your own faces, covering your coughs, and even keeping an appropriate distance from others when you must meet with them in person.

None of the things we have to do right now are easy, and it is hard to know what the proper balance between caution and care is. However, I do believe that we can come to decisions that are filled with an "abundance of caution" while also embodying an "abundance of love" for our people.

Finally, if you find that you are struggling during this time, please do contact us at the church office (408-739-1892) so that we can reach out to care for you. If you have questions or concerns, contact Bethann Merriam (bethann@svpc.us) to arrange a time to speak with me, or contact me directly at hardy@svpc.us. If you are seeking pastoral care or just want to talk to one of our Caring ministry folks, please contact Jean Rank (jean@svpc.us) or Pastor Karin Hejmanowski (karin@svpc.us). Our staff is very busy adjusting all of our communications and plans for activities, so please be patient if you need to leave a message for us.

Our annual congregational meeting, which was scheduled for March 15, will be rescheduled once we return to our regular worshiping schedule.

I wish you good health, strength and courage for these challenging times, and the abiding presence of God's Holy Spirit to uphold you during the days ahead.

In hope and faithfulness,

