

Dear First UB Church Family,

We are entering a season that is new to all of us! With each passing day, we are facing new decisions to make. Know that we are not making any decisions lightly or in fear, but in love and care for each one of you and the wider community. We are trying to keep everyone on the same page through this challenging time via using all social media platforms possible. (texts, email, Facebook, & our website: www.firstub.org) Please stay tuned to find answers to frequently asked questions and updates.

It's everywhere, reports of the coronavirus through our news, social media, federal, state, and local government. In the midst of both accurate / inaccurate news and rumors, it important for us to keep our eyes on the Lord And on His promises! I want to encourage you, be certain your motivation during this time is faith, not fear. Faith in a Sovereign God, nothing about this virus has caught God by surprise! He is & will always be on the throne! 1 Timothy 1:7 is abundantly clear, "We have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind." I want to encourage you to allow God & His promises to calm any fears or anxieties you may have. Proverbs 3:5-6 says: "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, lean not on your own understand; in all of your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." Trusting in God & putting our faith in Him allows us remain faithful. I am certain that this temporary trial will pass and yet we must respond in loving, caring and responsible ways. With that . . .

1. Don't panic! Listening to the news, social media, even sometimes those close to us can feed fear. If everyone was spending at least the same amount of time in their Bibles as they are online and on social media, the fears that many have would be replaced by the peace of God. If you are struggling with fear or anxiety, cast your cares on Him. In Philippians 4:6, Paul gives us this encouragement—put this into practice, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God." One of the best ways that the church and you in particular can respond is through prayer. Pray for our federal, state, and local government leaders. Pray for those affected by the virus and those who are vulnerable/displaced. Pray for your pastor/church leaders. Pray for those that may be affected financially. Pray, pray, pray!

2. Sunday Morning: Recent recommendations from the CDC have prompted us to make the difficult decision to make a change in the way we do "church" this weekend. It is indeed a great sacrifice, but in seeking the Lord, I believe it is the best and most loving option. On Sunday, March 22, we will not be meeting physically at 1900 Eastbrook Rd, instead, we will be moving worship to an online format. **We're not cancelling church-we're changing it. For those of you with Facebook accounts you can join us live Sunday morning at 10:30 AM. For those of us that don't use Facebook, simply join us by clicking on the YouTube link located on our website, firstub.org.** This is new for us. Even though the format is different, many are working to ensure that our First United Brethren Family **will worship the Lord together** this weekend!

3. Tithing: For the short term, how we live our call to be the church of Jesus Christ is shifting. However, the need to be the church has not decreased. Please remember to continue giving financially so we can continue the work to which we are called. You may mail your financial gifts to the church office (1900 Eastbrook Rd New Castle, PA 16101).

4. All Weekly meetings: Bible studies, Awana, Youth Ministry, and meetings will be suspended temporally. The suspension of these group activities are undetermined at this point in time. As mentioned before, please continue to check all social media platforms for updates.

5. The church is not “closed!” We are just doing some things differently. We are still in the business of seeing the lost come to Christ and grow in their walk with Him. We will weather this storm, and I believe through it, God will provide us opportunities to grow stronger in our faith and shine our lights even brighter! The church office will still remain open throughout the week.

6. How Long: The changes we are making in response to this virus are *temporary*. We will assess our situation on a weekly basis to make the most informed decisions possible. Also please remember that any changes & decisions that are being made are not easy & have been given prayerful and thoughtful consideration. This is an opportunity for us to be united, not critical. The Board and I desperately need your prayers for wisdom as we seek Him and as we lead our Church Family.

7. Be the church. The impact by the coronavirus will create hardship for many. Let's focus on how we can serve and love others where we live, work, & play. Let's allow this time to be an opportunity for God's strength and love to shine through us! In times like this, it is completely clear that God is calling His children to be the light of the world in some different ways. Eli Grove challenged us this past Sunday with a lot of ways to encourage and help others. For instance, how about picking up a prescription or doing some shopping for someone who's not able to get out? Look for ways by checking in on your neighbors, friends, & family. Look for ways that God could use you to bless others as you keep your eyes on Jesus!

Satan's purpose is to kill, steal, and destroy and you can be assured he feeds on casting fear and doubt. Fear is not God's plan for you. Let Jesus' words sink into your heart during this time, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

As your pastor, I will continue doing the work of pastoral care, though increasingly will be carrying out the majority of this work through email, text messages and phone calls. Please continue to let us know of illness, hospitalizations, and deaths by calling the church 724.654.9653. We want to pray for you & be present for you in whatever ways are possible.

Love in Christ -*Pastor Marc Stephenson*