Coronavirus Update

Tuesday, March 25, 2020

Dear Westmorelanders:

The coronavirus continues to waft its way around the earth, bringing with it illness, worry, social distancing, and economic uncertainty.

In the face of this pandemic, Westmorelanders are hosting sing-alongs on their front porches, making face masks for hospitals in short supply, calling other church member to check in, dropping off food and prescriptions, taking time to admire frogs in creeks and blooms on cherry trees, donating money to help groups, learning new technologies to join church events, and praying for each other and the world. I am inspired by and grateful for you.

This letter is to update you on our church life during these days.

Keeping in Touch. Regular emails go out from the church office every Monday and Friday. If you know of church members who are not receiving these emails or if you do not receive these and want to, contact Samantha Steinfeld at samantha@westmorelanducc.org or 301-229-7766.

Online Gatherings. We are using a platform called Zoom to gather for online worship every Sunday at 10:00 am. We have an online reflection and prayer gathering on Tuesdays at 12 Noon, and an online music and meditation time on Thursdays at 12 Noon. You may call into those gatherings at 1-646-876-9923 (Meeting ID 978381358#) or paste this link into the browser of your computer, phone, or other device: https://zoom.us/j/978381358.

Timeline. At this point we have no idea how long the need for social distancing and isolation will last. We will continue our virtual meeting for the foreseeable future.

Building. Our church building is closed at this time. The Briggs Center for Faith & Action, the Westmoreland Children’s Center, the Washington Conservatory of Music, and other groups that use our building have canceled their various events. The building is open to the various 12-step recovery groups that use our building are gathering at their own discretion as long as they are legally permitted to meet.

Church Staff. The church staff are all working remotely. You may reach them via email or by calling the church at 301-229-7766 and leaving a message in their respective voicemail boxes. The church staff are working their usual hours (or more) and are checking email and phone message remotely.

Friendly Callers. In these times of social distancing, we want to make sure that everyone in our church community feels connected and cared for. We are looking for church members to volunteer to call three or four
(or more) people each week. If you would like to be a “friendly caller,” please contact tim@westmorelanducc.org.

Run Errands. We have a few church members who may need groceries or prescriptions. If you are able to run errands for others, please contact tim@westmorelanducc.org.

Pastoral Care. Kaeley and I are able to provide pastoral care remotely, via phone calls, email, or video chats. We are not providing in-person visits. Hospitals, nursing facilities, and assisted living facilities are not allowing outside visitors. If you have a pastoral care need, please let us know.

Church Finances. The coronavirus pandemic is causing global economic uncertainty as seen in an erratic stock market. The church’s Finance Committee is paying close attention to how this may affect our church’s financial health. The Finance Committee has asked the church staff, boards, and committees to curtail all non-essential spending at this time. We are keeping a careful eye on our income and expenses. Feel free to contact our Finance Committee chair, Nancy Van Meter, with any questions or concerns about our financial life.

Giving. You may give to the church through our website. Go to WestmorelandUCC.org/give. Find the Online Giving button and follow the instructions. You may also mail checks to the church. I am aware that some of you may be cautious with your finances during these uncertain times. Your generosity continues to amaze me. Thank you for your ongoing gifts to support our community of faith.

Special Gifts. Thank you for your generous support of the medical debt buy-out program in conjunction with other DC-area UCC churches. You may read more about that at CongregationsAgainstMedicalDebt.org. You may give to our Social Justice Offering at WestmorelandUCC.org/give or you may mail a designated gift to the church. We typically collect that offering on Easter Sunday. Since we likely will not gather in person on Easter, please send those gifts at any time. Our Children’s Collection for March and April is peanut butter for SOME. We will gather those in person as soon as possible.

Boards and Committees. Kaeley and I will coordinate with Board and Committee chairpersons about online meetings in the coming days.

Congregational Meeting. The Governance Council has called a special Congregational meeting on Sunday, April 5. That meeting will take place online and will begin five minutes after the end of our online worship service. The purpose of this meeting is to vote on calling Kaeley McEvoy as our Associate Minister. The Governance Council and Personnel Committee are recommending changes to Kaeley’s job description and salary now that her ministerial ordination is nearing. Our practice is to have a congregational vote to call clergy into their roles. Kaeley’s ordination paper, job description, and call agreement will go out to the entire congregation in the coming days. Kaeley’s ordination is planned for Saturday, April 25, at her home church in Connecticut. Her installation is planned for Sunday afternoon, May 17, here at Westmoreland. Those dates may change.

Children’s Ministries. Laura Cooper and Sarah Feely are in touch with Church School parents about online, home-based spiritual formation resources for children.

Service Corps Update. Our current Service Corps interns are carrying out their work in various ways - some in-person, some online. Our Service Corps board is working to support them. Two of our interns offered “live"
reflections on service in early March. We are working to have the other three reflect on their year in the coming weeks. The Service Corp board is remotely interviewing candidates for the 2020-2021 year. The Service Corps Board is also making plans for minor updates to the Service Corps house as part of our Capital Campaign. Some generous donors have pledged to underwrite those renovations. Look for more information about the Service Corps in the future.

Social Justice. This pandemic has exposed in new ways the need for greater social safety nets. Kaeley and Tim will be working on a how-to-do-social-justice-from-home resource in the coming days.

Holy Week and Easter. At this point, we are planning to have online Holy Week and Easter services.

- We will celebrate Palm Sunday online at 10:00 am on April 5. That service will focus on washing. Have a bowl of water nearby when you log on for that service.
- We will observe Maundy Thursday online at 7:00 pm on April 9 with an online Communion experience. Have bread and wine (or your favorite food and beverage) close at hand for that service.
- Our Good Friday service will take place online at 7:00 pm on April 10. As part of that service we will light candles in our homes, so have a candle ready.
- On Easter Sunday, April 12, we will gather online at 10:00 am. We will celebrate resurrection and new life with a flower communion. Have a flower or plant nearby for that Easter celebration.

I’m aware as I type this letter that these plans may change. Your patience, flexibility, and grace are appreciated. You love for each other and care for the world are vital in these days. God’s best to you.

Sincerely,

Timothy Tutt