

Dear Church Families,

As each day passes, we receive more news on COVID-19, its spread, actions taken by government and medical authorities, school systems and other entities. As you are likely aware, the governor of Virginia has declared a state of emergency, encouraging all citizens to avoid large crowds. Many businesses are moving to work/learn-at-home status. Local schools are closing for varying periods of time.

We know that gathering as the community of faith is especially important and meaningful in challenging times. We are people of prayer and people who unite in service to others, especially in situations of great need. However, the welfare of all people is our utmost concern, and doing all that we can to stop the spread of this virus and to protect those who are most vulnerable in our church and in our community is our number one priority. Social distancing is said to be the most effective way to minimize the spread of the disease.

“For social distancing to be effective, it must begin early—so early that it may feel unneeded and silly. If we wait until its need is obvious, it is too late. The faith community has an important role to play in slowing the speed of disease transmission. Large gatherings of people are a petri dish for spreading the infection. For a period of time, I strongly urge our religious communities to suspend traditional services and gatherings and find other ways to practice and sustain our faith. Our witness and our example may save many lives, especially the lives of those at risk in our own congregations.” – Dr. Wes Wallace*

While we are reluctant to cancel church activities and worship, we feel that this decision is necessary under the current and projected conditions. Therefore, we have made the decision to cancel all non-critical church activities for the next two weeks. Worship will resume on Sunday, March 29, unless the situation worsens to the point that a more extended closing is necessary. Westover Hills Preschool will be closed from March 16 through March 27. The Westover Hills Tot Lot will be closed to the public during this time period as well. We are contacting individual groups that meet at the church to discuss the closing and anticipate that only our support and recovery groups will continue during this time.

During these next two weeks, we urge you to take care of yourselves and your families, and to reach out to your neighbors with acts of kindness. We recognize that worship and prayer are important every day, but even more so during difficult times. We encourage you to make use of the Lenten devotional that was prepared for this season. Every Saturday, those on our email list receive the next week’s devotions in their email. The entire devotional is also located on the church website, and daily devotionals are posted to the church Facebook page. Not only do we invite you to make use of these, but please share them with others as a way to reach out in love and concern. Staying grounded in God is the best way to calm our fears and gain perspective. I also plan to publish a Sunday Home Worship guide for each Sunday, with scripture readings, a meditation and questions for your reflection or family discussion.

The WHUMC staff will be working during these next two weeks, mostly remotely. We will be checking email and phone messages. However, if you have an urgent pastoral care or other need, please contact Pastor Donna directly at donnaholder@vaumc.org or (804)399-9295.

Thank you for being the loving people that you are. Please remember that the church must pay its bills even when no one is in the building. Help us to stay on good financial footing by continuing your regular giving by mail or online. Thank you.

Blessings,

Pastor Donna

**Dr. Wes Wallace is an adjunct professor of emergency medicine at the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is the medical director of State Medical Assistance Team 2, based at the University of North Carolina and a medical officer in NC-1, the federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team based in North Carolina. He is a member of University United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill.*