

November 18, 2020

Dear Westwood Church family,

We, as a congregation, as families, and as individuals, are living through a time of uncertainty that few have experienced in their lifetime. COVID-19 has upended our lives in countless ways that range from the merely inconvenient to the frightening realities of a silent virus.

Since returning to in-person worship in August, those of us who have been able to attend can readily attest to the fact that it is, indeed, a delight to worship together again. Even physically distanced, with masks and with fewer members present, our hearts have been filled with gratitude. After months of meeting outside or via Zoom, it has also been refreshing to be able to resume some meetings and activities in the church building.

However, as we have moved from the warmer months that have enabled activities to be outside and may have reduced the spread of the virus in our area, we have seen, both nationally and locally, a definite increase in the number of positive tests and cases. The number of cases being reported in our expanded area have risen significantly since those at the beginning of the shut-down earlier this year. Area hospitals are feeling the strain at an increasing rate, not only due to the number of cases that are testing positive and flooding their emergency rooms, but because of those who require hospitalizations. In addition, there is a rising number of health care workers who are also testing positive, impacting the ability of hospitals to care for those who need their help the most.

Due to these factors, the Ministry Council has reached a decision that, **effective November 18, all in-person worship and ministry gatherings will be suspended through December 12.** At that time, we will reassess this decision based on the number of cases and hospitalizations in our area. Sunday worship services, although not in-person, will continue to be available as live stream on YouTube, as well as Facebook and our church website. The Thanksgiving Day service will be pre-recorded next Wednesday and will be available Thanksgiving morning (YouTube, Facebook, church website). Further, the church building will be closed beginning today to all in-person groups and gatherings and casual drop-ins – with the exception of our church staff. This was not any easy decision to make, but one we felt was necessary to protect the health of everyone in our fellowship and community.

While we live into the uncertainty of the end of this year and possibly into the new one as well, we urge each of you to reach out to others, in whatever manner you can, to offer help, a listening ear, shared food, a card or call, or to ask for the help that you need to navigate this uncharted journey. Please be aware that our Pastor Mike and our ministry staff members, as well as your district elder and deacon stand ready to walk alongside of you. We all share one Lord, one faith, and one hope in the love and care of our Heavenly Father as experienced through the members of His body, the church.

Serving Christ together,

The Ministry Council of Westwood Church