

March 12, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Horseheads First Presbyterian Church,

I am writing to you today with deep concern for the well-being of our church community and the broader community across the Southern Tier, with particular attention to the general health of the congregation. I have been regularly following the local, state and federal response to **Coronavirus/COVID-19** and the spread of the virus continues to escalate daily.

Since the end of last year, we have seen the global spread of the **Coronavirus/COVID-19** illness. As of March 12th, 2020, there are no confirmed cases in Chemung County; that said, the anxiety across the country as well as within our state has risen dramatically. Beyond the spiritual well-being of our population, we must be attentive to these immediate health concerns. Last week our church took the initial actions of scrubbing all touch points in the church complex (door handles, push plates and bars, counters, tables, chair rails, etc. inside and outside) and we asked people to not shake hands or hug when greeting one another, and we did not pass the peace in the traditional way.

While those measures are helpful, medical professionals are also recommending social distancing by avoiding public gatherings as another preventative measure that can dramatically curb the spread of illness. I have been following the reports and news from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), New York State Department of Health (NYS-DOH) and the Chemung County Department of Health (CC-DOH), including calls the CC-DOH offices for specific information and attending a briefing earlier today, March 12th. Statewide gatherings of 500 or more people have been banned. Events of 50 or more are strongly discouraged. (Our recent attendance has been averaging 50 people.)

I have had extensive conversations with the Session and they have voted to cancel church for the upcoming three Sundays, March 15, 22 and 29. We will reassess along the way and may or may not be able to have Holy Week and Easter services, based on the guidance provided by local and state authorities. Additionally, all activities at the church scheduled for this

weekend, March 13, 14 & 15 have been cancelled. The Wednesday night Lenten dinner and discussion series is also cancelled. Session is going to meet on Sunday to discuss next steps related to caring for the congregation and the business operations of the church. There is a possibility that all church activities will be cancelled during these next few weeks. I will be communicating details as soon as I have more information.

During times of crisis, leaning on our church family, literally or figuratively, is our inclination. Sadly, that very comfort and care can then spread the illness. Due to its effect on *vulnerable populations*, being together for worship and conversation is not a good idea. (Vulnerable populations are defined as: people over 60 years old, people with underlying health conditions, and/or those who are immune compromised.) For the next few weeks, you can expect to receive at least two communications from me each week, including reflections and bible study activities for you to do at home. Your Deacon will also be reaching out to you regularly and you will also see more activity on our church website (<http://horseheadsfirstpres.steepleconnect.com/>) and our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/firstfreshorseheads/>), so please check in there.

I encourage you to keep yourself informed about the virus – how it spreads, who is most at risk, and how to protect yourselves, including cleaning measures. On the following page there are some basic steps we can all take during this time, and a few websites that will be helpful.

Friends, God's grace and love abound in the world, despite momentary upheavals like this; God's care for all creation and humanity is constant. During this season of Lent, I continue to encourage you to spend time in prayer and reflection. Pray for the community, for the sick and the vulnerable. Pray for good health and comfort. Pray for our church as we weather this storm. Further, I encourage you to pick up the phone and give one another a call, just to say hi and check in. I am available throughout these days and weeks, so please call me at the church office: (607) 739-3854.

In Christ,

Rev. Aaron D. Frank

The Lord said to Israel ... do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

—Isaiah 41:10

Important steps that we all can take to minimize the likelihood of transmitting an illness:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Here is as W.H.O. instructional video on hand washing: <https://youtu.be/IisgnbMfKvI>
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- For women/girls with long hair: consider braids or a ponytail to help keep hair away from her face. This will limit the need for a woman/girl to touch her face.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands with soap and water.
- If you are sick, stay at home and away from others.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces, especially “high-touch” areas like doorknobs, counters, light switches, remote controls, and cell phones.
- Hand sanitizer is a last resort when you can’t find a place to wash your hands properly. Hand Sanitizer must have at least 62% alcohol content to be effective.

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

NYS-DOH: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

Chemung county-DOH: <http://www.chemungcountyhealth.org/corona-virus-2019>

Who is at risk: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

Preventing Illness: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronaviruses%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html

Home cleaning: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html?fbclid=IwAR3zfzY4dFvptLGbCE6aXYDh-17jXF2XArOljfG152haoA3dbUP4DxKyOOY>