

March 18, 2020 -- Grace Note

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First Church, Evanston

Beloved in Christ,

Thank you for your amazing patience and cheerfulness last Sunday during our first and very basic Virtual Worship Service. From my end, it was a most nerve-wracking experience! However, if the numbers are accurate, it was one of largest gathering with 500+ viewers both during the live worship and after. You did your part signing the welcome folder and with emojis of love and smiles, until those watching from a distance began to sense there was a core community in the midst of it all. Bless you and keep it up!



As a congregation we went virtual quickly because of our love for neighbor. My prayer is that none of us will be sick, but of course there is a likelihood that some of us will be sick and recover, and a chance that someone among us might get very sick and even die. In a matter of fact way, your clergy have put plans in place for all those scenarios.



We are Easter people and Jesus challenges us not to be afraid of sickness or death. Our only fear is that we would harm or withhold help from our neighbor. Do No Harm! As one person said, "do not change your behavior to avoid being infected. Assume you are infected and change your behavior to avoid transmitting." So, if our face-to-face gathering would do harm, we will not meet face-to-face, but meet we will! After all, in our first Virtual Service we heard Jesus and St. Photini agree that "God is Spirit" worship in spirit and truth is not limited to a place. That's tough news for many of us who adore our building!

For the next Virtual Worship Services, I suggest two ways to prepare and two ways you can serve:

1. Learn to "Carry the Flame"
2. Create a dedicated worship center

3. Help as a Virtual Greeter
4. Fold ten thousand cranes and save TP rolls

1. Learn to "Carry the Flame"

We will end every Virtual Worship Service singing together the refrain of Carry the Flame, our very own hymn, which was written sixteen years ago by Brian Wren to celebrate our 150th anniversary. Each Sunday a soloist will sing a verse of the hymn and we will all join in the refrain together. It will be wonderful when we finally come together and belt it out standing close to each other and seeing each other's faces. If you have church selfies of your church family, please send those! I am attaching my church selfies!



2. Create a dedicated Worship Center/Home Altar

Since we cannot be at the church building, which serves as a spiritual center for many of us, I invite you to create a spiritual center by setting aside a small table as the dedicated worship center. At this dedicated center (which some call a "family altar"), you could place an open Bible and a candle which you can light as we begin our Virtual Worship Service together. Perhaps you can place a notebook where you can record prayers and prayer requests.



3. Help as a Virtual Greeter

To cope with our incredible crowd, we need Virtual Greeters to help make our service accessible and friendly. If you and/or your family would be interested in phoning in live during the worship and giving a 20 second shout out, please let me know. I hope every Sunday we will have three Virtual Greeters. I hope we "mix it up" so that we display the amazing diversity of our congregation in all ways. Please contact me for a detailed "job description."

4. Origami Cranes and TP Rolls

As we have heard, for whatever reason, toilet paper has been the Most Valued Player of this quarantine season. Out of curiosity, I am asking us all to save the cardboard center of our TP. What fun it will be to bring these cardboard rolls to worship at the end of our quarantine! If anyone has any ideas how we might use them, let me know!

TP aside, I do have a plan for ten thousand cranes of different sizes and different colors for a project I have desired for just about forever. It does not have to do with the ancient Japanese legend that promises that anyone who makes a thousand origami cranes will be granted happiness. But of course none of us would complain if by making ten thousand origami cranes, we bring our world peace and happiness. However, my idea for Young Disciples does call for ten thousand origami cranes of all colors and sizes. So, get folding! Google the

instructions. I cannot wait to see us pour thousands of origami cranes on the altar as thanksgiving when our quarantine is ended!

Finally, please know that your clergy and staff are busy working on weekday offerings. We have been making phone calls and the children's ministry is already in place with resources. Takeaway meals will be packed for our Soup Kitchen guests and information for online meetings have been posted for our AA gathering. Two days ago the Staff Parish Relations Committee successfully met online and agreed that all our staff and support team, including our custodians and



musicians, will not forgo their pay during this crisis. Today the Church Staff had a successful meeting online as well. Please let me know where else you are finding success! It is the season to celebrate small victories.

This is our hour! Our Christian faith was birthed in the crucible of social distancing. While in prison, St. Paul the Apostle wrote letters to his churches to stay connected as he told them to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of God's power" (Ephesians 6:10). John the Revelator found out that dreams and hopes cannot be quarantined by empires as sent word of glimpsing "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). And when Jeremiah realized God's people were about to experience social distancing from their place of worship, the prophet reminded thee people that despite the uncertain times, God had "plans to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Friends, let us dig deep into the root of Lent and in this imposed sabbath; let us listen to where and how God is calling us.

In Christ,

Pastor Grace

Contact

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First United Methodist Church is a community of Christians inviting all people to grow in their relationship with God and to live their faith in the world.