



Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

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February 27, 2020

Dear Friends,

Earlier this week, federal health officials advised hospitals, schools, churches, and other public facilities to begin making preparations for the anticipated spread of the coronavirus in the United States. Your pastors and staff have discussed this at length, and I have communicated with Session as well.

At this time, we feel it is important to take the situation seriously, yet not give in to unnecessary fear or anxiety. I encourage you to approach this public health concern as we are doing here at MAPC: by educating yourself, keeping up with the latest developments, being extra careful about hygiene and cleanliness, and keeping those affected by the virus in prayer.

General Information

As with any developing story, there is a great deal of misinformation being shared. The coronavirus is more than the common cold. But it is not the plague, either. The CDC has a great deal of information available [here](#) that explains what the virus is, how it spreads, and how you can protect yourself. It also provides the latest updates.

The New York City Health Department's [coronavirus site](#) also has useful information, including local resources and current statistics, including how many cases of the virus have been reported in the city so far.

The Atlantic published an article earlier this week, [You're Likely to Get the Coronavirus](#), which is both informative and reassuring. It explains why the virus is proving difficult to contain, but also emphasizes that in most cases, the virus is not life-threatening.

The New York Times has also published a [series](#) of informational pieces, including one [for parents](#).

In short, the precautions being recommended are the same as are offered during every flu season:

- Wash your hands, frequently.
- Keep your hands away from your face, especially your mouth, nose, and eyes.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick.
- Disinfect the surfaces in your home and office.
- Don't go to work (or church, or school) if you are feeling sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Facemasks are explicitly not recommended for those who are well; they are recommended only for those showing symptoms in order prevent the spread of the disease.

What MAPC Is Doing

These are the precautions we are taking in worship:

- During the Passing of the Peace, we will certainly not prohibit handshakes, but we will include a verbal reminder to be mindful of other ways to share Christ's peace: folding your hands in front of you and offering a head nod; verbal exchanges only; etc.
- During the offering, the pastoral staff will slip out of worship to wash their hands prior to serving. While hand sanitizer is a helpful tool, all recommendations note that simple hand washing is the best practice.
- We will continue celebrating the Lord's Supper and sharing communion as a community. We will monitor best practices week by week, following recommended guidelines. This week, only the pastoral staff will serve. In the event that one of our pastoral staff are unwell, we will recruit and train a volunteer. You will have the option to receive bread only (which has liturgical precedence back in the days of the early church!), or to receive bread that the pastoral staff will dip in the cup for you. In both cases, the bread will be dropped gently in your hands. While we do not wish to let anxiety interfere with our practice of the sacrament, we also have a holy obligation to care for our community, including those who may be particularly susceptible to illness. Additionally, if you personally wish to refrain from taking communion during this time, we respect that decision.
- At the conclusion of the service, the clergy will still wait in the Narthex to greet you as you depart. This week, we will refrain from handshaking, and will make weekly determinations about this as well. While we are not afraid of any of you, we feel obligated to respect all who are present and the varying degrees of bodily fragility.

These are the precautions we are taking throughout the building:

- The building staff have been instructed to be extra vigilant with our cleaning protocols, particularly in high-traffic areas such as the Lobby, the Sanctuary, and the elevators. We are increasing the cleaning protocols for the Overnight Shelter, the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church Day School, and the New York City Children's Chorus.
- Hand sanitizer, tissues, and anti-bacterial wipes will be available throughout the building.

Final Thoughts (For Now)

Please rest assured we are monitoring this public health situation very closely. We are in consultation with members of our congregation particularly skilled in managing these sorts of circumstances, and with our peer congregations in the area about the most effective steps we should be taking as a church.

Meanwhile, we will continue to worship on Sunday. We will continue to educate some of our city's youngest through the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church Day School. We will continue to open our doors for the Overnight Shelter, the Open Table meal ministry, our Recovery Groups, and everything else that makes up our shared ministry together.

If you need assistance, particularly if you feel ill and will not be coming to worship, please let us know. Your pastors are here to help.

Please do all that you can to maintain your health and the health of your family, friends, colleagues, and fellow members of this faith community. Be in touch with me or any of the pastoral staff if you have questions, concerns, or helpful suggestions. And trust that, with God's abiding grace, all will be well.

Grace and peace to you, this day and every day.