

Dear South,

So much has changed very quickly about the Corona Virus (Covid-19) just since Sunday, and with those changes lots has shifted about what actions are most responsible and needed now. **I have come to the conclusion that suspending in-person worships (Sunday and other) is the socially-responsible decision to make, done out of care for those most vulnerable to this virus.**

Humility is my main faith-response and invitation to us all at this moment; we need to be humble in the face of this virus, respecting it, not trying to be too stubborn or too proud, thinking that it won't impact us and that we can go about our business as usual; there are times when we need to recognize our limits. We are in this together - even if we will be less so physically - and I know we can respond to this in faith, in community, and even with some surprising joy.

With the announcement of the [State of Emergency in MA](#) and other New England states, as well as emerging support and encouragement for broad social distancing as key in slowing the spread of this serious virus, **we are making the difficult - but important - decision to suspend in-person worship services at South for the time being, this includes Sundays as well as our Thursday night Lenten series.**

I have discerned carefully, reflecting with staff and leadership as well as with other clergy, and taking in as much of the science about the spread of Covid-19 as I can in making this decision.

There is definitely a part of me that has the impulse to say "we'll be just fine" and to keep gathering, but a much larger part is urging me and us to be humble in the face of this virus, to respect its quick-spreading nature, and how harshly it impacts the most vulnerable and to take action now before it gets worse. **The decision that emerges from this humility is that we can and should take a pause from in-person worship.**

We have many vulnerable (elderly, poor, other health dynamics at play) people in our congregation, building and community. As much as the natural impulse to continue gathering and to continue having this place of community feels like the most caring and compassionate thing to do, I think that the harder but more responsible decision - and one which requires a good dose of humility - is to suspend in person worship until we have more clarity about the virus. By so doing, **we will be a part of slowing it's spread in Springfield and our communities.**

A central goal of social distancing is to "flatten the curve" of the rate of virus spread. Flattening the curve - slowing the rate of the epidemic - is critical in that it enables our health care system to actually provide care for those who get the virus and most need it. [There is a helpful visual in this article](#) explaining this.

Fear not! We will still be connected in prayerful ways. I will still write and share sermons and other reflections. Larry and I are working to figure out how to share music. We will use the many tools available to us to stay connected in worship and in care.

For those online:

- We have just created a [Soundcloud account](#), (or go to soundcloud.com and search "South Congregational Church, UCC") where audio files of sermons and other messages will be uploaded and shared.
- We will decide how to use some video sharing through FB Live or Vimeo. Zoom could be a tool for a virtual small group gathering. Stay tuned!
- Of course, FB and the website are available

For those offline and for All:

- We will look into setting up a "worship conference call"
- We have a "Staying Connected through Coronavirus" team in formation (Larry, me, Cathy, Elliott..) that will make sure to be in touch by phone.
- Letter writing. How good does it feel to get a letter?! Terry already does a letter writing offering and we are going to brainstorm how to expand this.
- Reflections, sermon notes and prayers can also be shared by mail.

We will be in touch with more specifics about alternative worship materials. As we create alternative services, we are being mindful of how they can be accessible for all.

And we are calling those in our community who are off-line to let them know.

****Please let us know how you are doing and what you need.**

We will be checking the office phone in person and remotely:

413-732-0117, at least daily. The office email is also a good central hub

- secretary@sococh.org.**

One consideration that has very much impacted my thinking and been at my heart is our community in **Loaves and Fishes**. Darleen and I have been in regular touch. They are continuing to feed the community. They are in partnership with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and will be following their guidance in regards to significant changes they may need to make. **Darleen knows that South is here to support them however we can.**

This is a confusing and stressful time. But it is also a time when we can learn and practice how to care for one another, and support and encourage one another in new ways. There are many creative opportunities in this challenge. It is for challenges that our faith prepares us. God's radical love and saving grace is already at work among us, in the community, in the world.

In Faith,
Rev. Lindsey

Here is another article informing my
thinking: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-cancel-everything/607675/>.