

Dear Friends in Christ

In the midst of a public health pandemic, it is easy to react out of fear. Granted this seems like a logical response. However, we are doing our best at Emmanuel to react out of caution, concern, and evidence as we navigate what are the best decisions as we traverse this piece of our faith journey together. The most important part is to remember that we are on a journey of faith in the God who created us, redeemed us, and restores us through the love and unconditional grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are attempting our best to respond from a perspective of faith, with our decisions and decision making processes rooted in our love of God, one another, and in our call to be "Working to Care for ALL God's people." This call includes ourselves and our neighbors throughout the world. Again, the most important thing for us is to root our decisions in our faith in God's love for all people.

So far our decision making process has been in response to where there are cases of COVID-19, direction from public health agencies, discussion among our local experts, and conversation among the congregational council. As the cases increase or decrease, in incidence and distance, I am sure our response will change. In other words, we will do our best to react with appropriate caution and also with appropriate reservation seeking to find the area between overreaction and caution. It also means I am asking you to pay attention to our [website](http://www.elcetna.org), [your email](mailto:www.Facebook.com/elcetna), and [the church Facebook page](https://www.Facebook.com/elcetna). These will be the primary locations of information pertaining to information of our decisions of response to the concerns surrounding COVID-19. We will do our best to keep the answering machine greeting at church up to date but need to be onsite to do so and we need to plan for the possibility that we will not be able to be on site. Therefore, if none of the technological resources are available to you, you are always welcome to call me if you have any questions at my direct line of 412-600-6232

- **Website:** www.elcetna.org
- **Facebook:** www.Facebook.com/elcetna

We have not cancelled worship for this coming Sunday March 15, 2020 (as of March 13, 2020 @ 15:00)

We have postponed the Spaghetti Dinner: The Spaghetti Dinner scheduled for March 14, 2020 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Etna has been postponed until a future date to be determined. We have rooted this decision in our call to be "Working to Care for ALL God's People." In the current context of matters related to COVID-19, our focus of work at this point is to be one of awareness and proactive caution, and we want people to be as safe and healthy as possible.

The difference between worship and the spaghetti dinner in our decision making is the number of people gathered and the type of gathering.

It may sound odd at first hearing but it is possible to practice a form of distance while still being in worship. Therefore, regarding worship and considering the health concerns surrounding COVID-19, we encourage you to consider greeting one another in a non-contact method at worship. Perhaps a bow of recognition, hand on the heart, an elbow bump, or a sign of peace such as raising your first two digits. Communion assistants will meet in the sacristy during the passing of the peace to wash their hands. If you prefer to take communion with only one element you may be confident in our belief that Christ is

fully present in both the bread and the wine. We will also be using disposable prefilled cups for communion. Thank you for your attention and concern for your family of faith.

Regarding worship, please remember that we do not have obligations to fulfill in terms of worship in God's perspective. In other words, if you feel like it is best for you not to be in worship due to health concerns, please trust that your decision is respected and affirmed, and appropriate. In addition, please understand your personal risk and whether or not you are in a category of elevated risk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, elevated risk categories are older adults and persons with chronic medical conditions.

If you are currently ill, or if you have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19, please refrain from attending worship. Additionally, consider the same measures if you have recently returned from traveling in an area with COVID-19 cases.

Looking ahead we are working on solutions if we are unable to gather for worship and also to include those that are unable to gather or have made a decision that they should not gather with us in person. Such alternatives may include live streaming video and posting of the video on our website. From a practical perspective of church functioning, please remember that you may continue to offer your financial gifts via the church website "Give" button, as well as mailing via US Postal service to the church office.

We will continue to update you as this situation continues. Please remember to keep everyone in your prayers, those affected around the world who have become ill, those who have lost friends and family, those that are working incredibly long hours to try and mitigate the effects, and those who are suffering financially, medically, or are suddenly lacking places of safety. If you have questions or concerns please do not hesitate to call or write. I have also included links to letters from Bishop Kusserow and Presiding Bishop Eaton.

May the peace of Christ be with you all.

Peace

Pastor JJ