

From the Pastors

We're all aware of Covid-19/Coronavirus and how quickly it's being spread throughout our world. While much of the details surrounding how best to deal with the coronavirus is unknown, what we do know is that social isolation is a positive means to combat the spread of the virus. We also know that there is a period of time (about 2 weeks) during which one can be contagious but without symptoms. This may be why people have been quarantined for 14 days as that's the time it can take for symptoms to appear. In response to this many events have been canceled throughout our country and our school systems are going to digital learning at home. So, as Christians, what should be our response to this pandemic?

First of all, as God told Joshua, *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:9 ESV). We need to remember that our God is full of mercy, compassion, love, and grace. He will walk with us every step of the way, not only through this pandemic, but throughout all of our lives. He is sovereign over everything that transpires and will always bring good out of every situation He brings into our lives. We must not give in to fear because God is good and will be with us.

Secondly, Jesus tells us *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another"* (John 13:34 ESV). There are many avenues through which we carry out this commandment. However, in this time of uncertainty we should continually be checking on each other, primarily through electronic means, using emails, phone calls, and texts, and praying for one another. We would also ask that as you are made aware of needs you contact your shepherding group elder or deacon, or one of the pastors so that we can pray and help in any way possible. Due to the current pandemic there's also one more way by which we can express love to our church family at Highlands, and that's to suspend physically meeting together for events.

You see, thirdly, we're called to *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil"* (Ephesians 5:15, 16 ESV). Since this virus is so contagious and since several people at Highlands are more highly at risk, the elders of Highlands (Session) have determined it would be best to suspend physical meetings and events for the next two weeks beginning this Sunday, March 15. This means that from March 15 - March 28, all Highlands activities are canceled. The upcoming Middle School Retreat has also been canceled. We will update you each week when we are able to determine the proper time to begin meeting together again. We believe that one of the most loving things we can do for our congregation is not to hold public services. This is the same thing we do when it comes to inclement weather, such

as snow and ice, and is an act of love and wisdom to keep people safe. We will keep the doors locked, with a sign explaining how to “Worship Together Online!”

Finally, as the Apostle Paul once told the Colossians *“for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is”* (Colossians 2:5 ESV). Even though we won’t be physically meeting together we can still meet together spiritually. God, in His Providence, moved Highlands several years ago to install a system for streaming our services over the internet. Pastors Mark and Chris will conduct a worship service for every Sunday, at 10 O’clock, until we’re able to physically meet again. We will worship together online. All the elements of our Worship service will remain the same. You can even participate by tithing online through our website. Though we won’t be together in person, we will be worshipping together in Spirit.

We encourage you to worship with us live online this week. Using a computer, cell phone, or even a streaming device connected to your television, (Roku, Firestick, Apple TV, etc.) you all should be able to connect, joining together spiritually, as we worship the Lord together. For those of you that have children, Ms. Bonnie will even have a brief message for the Kids. The video feed will go live sometime around 9:45 each Sunday. If you’re using a computer or a cell phone visit our website at: www.highlandsarp.org and click “Worship Online With Us” located at the top of the main page and it’ll take you to the live stream for each Sunday. If you’re using a streaming device just download the LIVESTREAM app onto your device, open it, create your own account if necessary (it’s free), then search accounts for Highlands Presbyterian (or HighlandsARP) and click on the link that appears. That should take you to the events page where you’ll find an icon, listed by date, for each Sunday’s service and click on that icon when it’s time. You can test this on Saturday as the link for this week’s service is already available. If you have any questions call Pastor Chris or Pastor Mark.

We want you to know that you are, by God’s grace, what makes Highlands such a wonderful family. You all have been such a great encouragement to us, as pastors, elders, and deacons. We know this is a troubling time, but we also know this too will pass. Please keep yourselves and your families as safe as possible, following the suggestions of our medical experts. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your shepherding elder or one of the pastors. Above all, always remember that *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1 ESV).

On Behalf of the Session,
Pastor Mark & Pastor Chris