

 [FirstCongregationalUCCIndy](#)

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Epistle for the Week of March 19, 2020

ALL in-person church activities are CANCELED through the end of March 2020.

Dear First Congregational,

As we enter into our second week living into our new realities of social/physical distancing, we remain committed to three key ways to **Be The Church: Worshipping, Connecting and Loving.** We will worship together Sundays [at 11am](#) using our church's Facebook Live. [This Sunday](#) I am going to spend a little time at the beginning of worship inviting us to comment and share morning greetings with another. I also encourage you to create a home worship space. This could be as simple as a candle, a flower, a bible, a favorite work of art, plant, photo or snuggling your favorite pet or stuffed animal. However you want to create a sacred space at home, I encourage you to try it. I will invite you to share photos of your sacred space. On Facebook Live worship, we will offer hymn singing, scripture, message, prayer, passing of peace, sharing ways to give and serve. We will worship together and God's heart will be made glad by our worship. Our hearts will be made glad because through worship we will connect

with each other and connect with God.

We will **Be The Church through Connecting**. Our Care and Connections Board is working hard to organize ways we can connect with one another. We are committed to reaching out and building up our church family during this time. I encourage you to reach out to one another, make phone calls, send texts, emails. We have a new Facebook Group for our church members and friends called "First Congregational Indy Fellowship." This is a place for us to connect, share photos, stories, prayers and check in with each other. We are also making use of technology such as Zoom Video Conferencing. Please let me know if your Board, Committee, Team or Small Group would like to use Zoom and we can schedule a meeting time. If you need directions or guidance, we can walk you through the process.

We will **Be the Church through Loving**. Our love for one another is what will get us to the other side. Love begins in our hearts, moves into our thoughts, our words, and blossoms in our deeds. I invite us to use this time to nurture the love within our hearts. Meditate on God's love for you and the whole world. Share words of love with each other. Let this love inspire your actions. One way to put your love into action is through supporting organizations that are offering help, hope and healing. Consider making your donation online to First Congregational and other organizations (see notice below).

For now, all in-person church activities are cancelled through the end of March. Our Church Council will hold a special meeting next Wednesday to discuss our plans for moving forward and make some decisions about our life together for the coming month of April. We will consider the CDC guidelines and take into consideration the best interests and wellbeing of our congregation. We will provide you an update following the council meeting on March 25.

As always, reach out to me if you need any help, would like to talk, or have a joy or concern to share. My cell is (386) 478-9012. We are learning together how to Be The Church in important ways and I give God thanks for our amazing staff and lay leaders who are working faithfully to Be The Church. I give God thanks for our church family and for each one of you.

Peace,
Pastor Sarah



(Photo Credit: Shannon Abbott, altar)

Worship

Sunday Worship Service on Facebook Live, 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Sarah will preach on "God is With Us."

Scripture: Psalm 23

First Congregational Lenten Immigration Journey

Through the season of Lent, we will explore, reflect, and pray about the biblical and contemporary theme of immigration. What does the Bible say about immigration? What is the Still Speaking God saying to the church today about immigration? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus in light of the complex realities at the US/Mexico border?

April 5 - Palm Sunday

April 9 - Maundy Thursday

April 10 - Good Friday -

April 12 - Easter



What's Happening at FC: Support While Social Distancing

Staying Connected

As we all burrow in and hunker down at home, let's find as many avenues for connections as possible. Anyone who hasn't yet dabbled in Facebook, now is the perfect time. Not only can you participate in our live streamed worship service on Sunday, but if you're busy Sunday morning you can also access the service at a later time on the same **FC Facebook page** (click [here](#)). Also, check out the "**First Congregational Indy Fellowship**" group on Facebook (click [here](#)). It's specifically for FC family and friends, and it's a great way to continue to share with the group what's going on in our lives. If you've set up a Facebook account to get the live streamed worship, you can easily join the "Fellowship" group simply by searching for the page and hitting the "join" button. I look forward to catching up with as many of you as possible as the weeks drag on, and Facebook is a great way to do that. See you there! – Alice Rutherford, Moderator

Pastoral Care

We are all still here for you and will stay connected. You can contact Pastor Sarah for pastoral care needs at (386) 478-9012 or pastorsarah@fcindy.org.

Additional Church Support Contacts

Pastor Carol (casowle@gmail.com)

Office Administrator, Shannon (shannon@fcindy.org)

Moderator, Alice Rutherford (alice@caloosapirit.net)

Vice Moderator, Larry Eckel (lspeckel@comcast.net)

From your W.I.S.E. Mental Health Team (Welcoming+Inclusive+Supportive+Engaged)

We have received several pages of support and resources from our United Church of Christ Mental Health Network that we want to share with all of you. We want all of you to know that Pastor Rev Dr. Sarah Lund is available, Pastoral Care Associate Pastor Carol Sowle are

always available especially during this pandemic.

We share these Words of Encouragement from Rev. Alan Johnson, chair of the UCC Mental Health Network:

“Many words have been written to address the uncertainty we are experiencing as we live into the presence of the coronavirus in the world. Our routine congregational life has been disturbed. Our customary routines to keep our community bonds strong are unraveling. Our Sunday worship services, committee and board meetings, support groups, fellowship gatherings, ...all these are being canceled, through new technologies to bind up our connections as faith communities. As chair of the UCC Mental Health Network, I know the healing power of personal stories and the resilience and strength that come through our congregations. In particular, persons who are affected by any mental health challenge already know that finding a safe place and people where their story can be marshaling the spiritually woven forces of trust, love, and wisdom to become even more vital. . . . The phrase “social distancing” has a chilling edge to it as well as a reality so as to prevent spreading the virus. Paying attention to the downsides of the pandemic can lead to some creative ways to sustain the connections even when the physical connections are not recommended. Being attentive to any who are disconnecting due to this virus, whether or not there is a mental health challenge, the well being of everyone can be enhanced. That can be a boost to one’s immune system itself!

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love and sound judgment” 2 Timothy 1:7 The air we breathe these days is tainted by fear. Our anxiety for ourselves, our loved ones, our community, and the world is having a field day. There are numerous ways for each of us to release our fear and find the power that comes from trust. Trust that we, human beings, will find a way through even when some walk through the shadow of the valley. We can consider what we can control and what we cannot control. That in all things we can receive, find and offer love to one another. And we can be judicious as we move on this changing earth. This is encouraging and it can boost our faith system, too!”

Do Not Fear by Karl Shallowhorn, board member of the UCC MHN:

“So do not fear, for I am with you: do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

"The events of the last week have changed the course of life as we know it in the US. In the end, it isn't about who's the blame or what could have been done. It's too late for that now. We have to all work together to prevent what is quickly becoming something that is proving to be a very formidable enemy.

One thing I do know, however is that many people, including myself, have had their anxiety heightened by the virtual uncertainty of the future. Now, I've never been one to have anxiety

(although I do live with bipolar disorder) however the situation we are in has even got me more on edge.

But this is where, as I told a friend today, I need to use my tools. First and foremost, I need to remember to **breathe**. Deep. Breathing can do wonders to alleviate anxiety and help reduce stress.

Secondly, I need to **have faith**. Faith can not only move mountains, it can help to provide a deep sense of assurance that things will be okay.

Third, I can **use my supports** to provide to each other amidst the tide of turbulent waters we are in. There is nothing quite like having someone to talk to, to just let it all out.

Fourth, I need to **reach out** to those less fortunate and who may be in need. Most of us probably know someone who may be more isolated as a result of the current environment we are in. Not only does it help them, but it also helps me to get out of my own head. When I help someone else I know that I am doing what I, as a Christian, have been asked to do.

Next, I need to **attend to my self-care**. Sleep is a big one as is physical exercise. The combination of the two can be very beneficial in helping to regulate my system. And I cannot forget to meditate. Even just being still and quiet for as little as ten minutes can do wonders for the mind, body and spirit.

At last, but certainly not least, I need to **pray**. In the course of my life I have faced incredibly difficult situations, all of which I've been able to get through by actively praying. Not only with words but also with action. When I pray I co-create with God thereby allowing for the process of becoming the person I was intended to be. In terms of today, I need to pray to let God know that I need God's strength and guidance to be able to maintain my mental and emotional stability.

If I practice these simple tools, I have a much more likelihood of weathering the storm of uncertainty we are all facing.

While the days ahead are going to be very hard for many, if not most of us, it is important to know that with God in our lives there truly is nothing to fear."

There is more to come from your church's W.I.S.E. Mental Health Team.

United Church of Christ Mental Health Network: mhn-ucc.com

Shine: www.virusanxiety.com

Mental Health America: https://www.mhanational.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwjcfzBRCHARIsAO-1_Oqvf39RdYaqM4bj_NdW_wU1v6fNYNH5Wti-e3uKsrCQI7Gf_CcKNCUaAnVhEALw_wcB

CDC on Coping with the Stress & Anxiety Related to COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

WISE Mental Health Books

There are new Mental Health books on a designated shelf in the Library ready for checkout. Stop by and pick one (or more) up (use the door security passcode) to read during this time of social distancing.

Indiana to Offer Psychological First Aid Trainings

The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration and American Red Cross Indiana will launch two virtual psychological first aid training courses for healthcare and social services professionals. The training is to help individuals exposed to a traumatic event or disaster. They'll take place from 1 to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, March 24 and Tuesday, April 7 to the first 30 participants to register for each session.

- <https://ddrsprovider.fssa.in.gov/Events/Public/Register.aspx?ReturnTo=Calendar&CalendarMonth=3&CalendarYear=2020&CourseID=856>
- <https://ddrsprovider.fssa.in.gov/Events/Public/Register.aspx?ReturnTo=Calendar&CalendarMonth=4&CalendarYear=2020&CourseID=857>

Anyone feeling anxiety from the pandemic should be encouraged to call the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Distress Helpline at 800-985-5990**, or **text "TalkWithUs" to 66746**. Users will be connected with trained crisis counselors.

From the IK Conference Office

During this uncertain time it is important that we stayed tied together as a people of prayer and support. Weekly we will send out a prayer for the world and our conference churches on Wednesdays. We also encourage each of you to stop what you are doing at noon on Wednesdays and pray wherever you are. Our staff will be praying wherever they are and together we will offer prayers for our world at this time.

Peace, Blessings, and Compassion,
Rev. Chad R. Abbott, Conference Minister

Bread for the World COVID-19 Update: 2020 Joint Offering of Letters in Indiana*

Learn more about Bread for the World's national response to COVID-19 (aka coronavirus), and hear an update on how you can *still* participate in the 2020 Joint Offering of Letters — even in quarantine.

Life just changed radically for many people around the world — including Hoosiers. As known cases of the coronavirus continue to grow, our schools are closing, sending children home, away from the benefit of school meals. Houses of worship are replacing in-person worship for virtual opportunities to “be together” — and making tough decisions about how to continue to serve some of the most vulnerable populations in our midst through food pantries, and the like. **As Bread President David Beckmann says: COVID-19 “is a hunger issue.”** While we want to exercise caution in *how* we gather, Bread for the World - Indiana still plans to keep you engaged in advocacy that is needed now more than ever. But we are exploring ways for you to participate from the safety of your own home.

Register here today, then join us by computer or by phone for a 90-minute webinar for advocates like you.

Saturday, March 21 (10am - 11:30am) - We press on with the **2020 Joint Offering of Letters** because the coronavirus only *emphasizes* the need for our current letter-writing campaign.

“Better Nutrition, Better Tomorrow” focuses on asking Congress to ensure more children in the U.S. and abroad receive proper nutrition. Good nutrition builds strong immune systems. In the face of this global pandemic, our communities are only as strong as the weakest immune systems among us. ***Please share this invitation with other hunger advocates. Send them the registration***

link: https://webinar.ringcentral.com/webinar/register/WN_S41GzClqSAOkImBcP7wgYg

**This webinar offers a virtual replacement for the previously planned, in-person 2020 Joint Offering of Letters event for Indiana Bread for the World: “Cultivating Common Ground to End Hunger.” We look forward to Jeremy Everett, Texas hunger advocate and author of “I Was Hungry” joining us in Indiana, at a time yet to be determined.*



March Mission of the Month: One Great Hour of Sharing

The Mission of the Month in March is One Great Hour of Sharing. This is one of the five special offerings of the UCC and provides support around the world for disaster relief and community restoration. Begun after the devastation of World War II, Christian churches from a number of denominations responded to the call for international relief. Each denomination raised and directed their own funds but did so as a part of a common effort that beginning in 1950 has

been called One Great Hour of Sharing. In 2020, the UCC will use our offering to respond to international disasters, to assist refugees in the United States, and to help communities become more sustainable with programs that help people to help themselves. This offering is our opportunity to share with the people of the world and be present when our love and support are most in need.

DONATE ONLINE at: https://www.ucc.org/oghs_gifts

Pantry Items of the Month

During the month of March, we are collecting: spaghetti, rice, juices, peanut butter, and bar soap.

Food Donations for the Northside Pantry

Donations have been generous and are appreciated. Please keep them coming! There is great need for this support right now! We are grateful to the Meridian Hills Nursery School and Kindergarten who has agreed to continue helping us deliver the food to the pantry.

Continue Your Support of First Congregational UCC

Please continue supporting the mission and ministries of your local church at <http://www.fcindy.org/online-giving/>

Support Your Local IN-KY Conference Through Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM)

The staff of the IKC are working tirelessly to support local churches as we all discern best practices and how to get through this time together. Please remember to support the work they do and the many ministries they support through your **OCWM**

Giving at: <https://ikcucc.org/connect/donate/>

Eviction Ministry Donations

The Eviction Ministry is a new ministry of the SouthEast Association of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the UCC. The purpose of this ministry is to offer assistance to those who do not qualify for other state or local assistance programs and without such assistance would be evicted from their homes. During this time of increased financial concerns and unemployment, we anticipate an increase of requests for assistance. Please consider making a donation. **Checks can be made out to: Southeast Association of the IKC UCC.** Please include in the **memo line: "Eviction Ministry."**

Donations can be mailed to the treasurer at:

SE Association Eviction Ministry

Attn: Margie Potter

726 Coach Rd.

Indianapolis, IN 46227

Thank you for your generosity!

- Shannon Abbott, Eviction Ministry Team

Feeding Families

Gleaner's and Second Helpings are two of the food banks currently offering food to children who usually get their meals from school.

Donate to **Gleaner's** by clicking on the link [here](#).

Donate to **Second Helpings** by clicking on the link [here](#).

THIS WEEK AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

Sunday morning worship 11AM via Facebook Live

at <https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalUCCIndy/>

All other events have been canceled through the end of March.