



Lakewood Congregational Church  
An Open and Affirming Church of the United Church Of Christ  
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Rev. Joanna D'Agostino  
Senior Pastor

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Dear Beloved Community,

At LCC, we have been actively seeking out denominational and community resources, and remaining in conversation with our staff and church leaders as well as the staff and parents at Haynes Nursery School about how we might respond to the current pandemic, COVID-19 coronavirus. As people of faith committed to the well-being of our neighbor, we have an obligation to respond both to the scientific reality of the outbreak and to our community's anxiety surrounding it. It does not escape me that the anxiety in this time is felt in our souls and even in our bodies.

So remember to take a deep breath, lower your shoulders, unclench your jaw, and bring your concerns to God. In September, we committed to a focus scripture for the year from 1 John 4:18, "Perfect love casts out fear." We hold tightly to that promise today, while recognizing that through intentionality and preparedness we can calm fear, disseminate accurate information, and modify our religious practices so that we are keeping people safe while continuing to provide spiritual care.

Our denomination has created a set of helpful resources as we consider what impact the coronavirus might have on our faith communities. Their most recent update can be viewed here: [https://www.ucc.org/news\\_ucc\\_churches\\_establish\\_protocols\\_preach\\_awareness\\_not\\_panic\\_as\\_covid\\_19\\_cases\\_grow\\_03102020](https://www.ucc.org/news_ucc_churches_establish_protocols_preach_awareness_not_panic_as_covid_19_cases_grow_03102020).

Yesterday, Governor Mike DeWine issued the following statement: "After consulting with experts, we know that the decisions we make in the next few days and weeks will determine how many lives are lost in Ohio and how long this pandemic will last. Therefore, I'm recommending that Ohio limits a variety of large gatherings in order to protect public health," said Governor DeWine.

Specifically speaking of religious gatherings, the Governor "recommends that all religious institutions consider limiting practices that could spread germs, such as shaking hands or sharing a communal cup of wine during communion. Those in faith-based communities who are high-risk should consider staying home. Faith-based communities should also consider appropriate outreach to those who may not be able to attend regular services."

Grounded in these recommendations, our current intention at LCC is as follows:

- Be ever-prayerful for the "least of these" in this time and in all times.
- Gatherings of over 25 people, with the exception of worship, will be canceled or rescheduled. Youth Musical participants can look for separate instruction from Domenic and Rachel.
- We have plenty of room in the pews, so you can spread out to whatever degree makes you and your neighbors comfortable.
- We will forego coffee hour, at least this week, and likely next week as well.
- We encourage you not to shake hands before, during, or after worship.
- We will address communion practices as the first Sunday of April approaches.
- We do encourage those who are elderly or immunocompromised, or if you are experiencing contagious symptoms, to consider staying home. God is with you right where you are. If you'll

let me know, we will call and check in on you, and even send you a copy of the bulletin and manuscript of the sermon, too. But coming to church, even if you're signed up to lead in some way, is less important than tending to yourself and not risking getting others sick, too, whether it's the coronavirus, the flu, or just a cold.

- I am suspending pastoral visits to nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospitals, mostly because many of them are already on restriction, but also in keeping with the Governor's recommendations. I encourage you to do the same.

We are blessed to work with Moran's Clean Sweep Cleaning Company and our custodian, John, uses professional cleaning products and sanitation procedures. Additionally, Haynes Nursery School follows Ohio Department of Job and Family Services procedures for classroom sanitation and classroom handwashing.

Dear ones, Jesus's call is clear: loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves means caring about bodies as well as the souls that inhabit them. Remember we belong to each other. Keep the faith and practice the Gospel. Find ways to connect with those who may experience more loneliness than usual in the coming weeks. Look after your neighbor. Be the light.

Because of Jesus,

Rev. Joanna D'Agostino  
Senior Pastor