



Lakewood Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Church of the United Church Of Christ

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Rev. Joanna D'Agostino

Senior Pastor

July 25, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Lakewood Congregational Church,

I commend to you the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: *"We do not grieve as others do who have no hope."* These words help sustain me. There's a lot of grief: the loss of life as we knew it, the loss of dreams, the loss of jobs, homes, traditions, relationships, travel, sports, music, normalcy, and, lest we forget, the global loss of more than 620,000 lives to Covid-19, and the loss of loved ones to other causes. That grief is real and there is no magic potion to make it all go away.

BUT— thanks be to God— we do not grieve as others do who have no hope. We do grieve, but our hope is bigger than our grief. It is upon us now to reorient towards the hope God has given us. How can we use our hope and trust in God so that instead of only grieving what we have lost, we can dream about and energize ourselves towards what is being created within and around us?

## **Covid-19 Update**

Our Advisory Team and staff have been in constant communication with the United Church of Christ (and the ELCA, because of Trinity Lutheran Church), the Lakewood Ministerial Association, Greater Cleveland Congregations, and pastors and churches throughout the country. We have had countless conversations regarding safe reopening, and we will have countless more. We have begun to develop guidelines about what a safe reopening would look like for us, but we remain confident in our current decision to resume in-person worship when the Ohio Department of Health reports a two-week decline in cases in Cuyahoga County. We are mindful that even after that benchmark is met, many of the beloved ones we are in covenant with will not be able to safely attend worship in our sanctuary until there is a vaccine, so it will be essential for us to continue providing a quality online service option, and continued connection with our community.

With all of that in mind, we cannot allow ourselves to grow weary and isolated, because *we do not grieve as others do who have no hope*. God is calling us to seize the hope and energize ourselves to build community, grow connections, and walk our Spiritual Journey in new and meaningful ways. Lakewood

Congregational Church is here to build those connections across generations and geographic boundaries, and walk alongside each of you on this particularly unique path on our spiritual journey.

## **Remote Church Survey**

<https://forms.gle/4ViGJpEa26RdUC1H6>

*Or use enclosed hard copy*

We have created a survey to help us understand how we can more effectively support and build up this Body of Christ for the foreseeable future. It will also help us determine how to direct the time and energy of our staff and lay leadership. This survey does not commit you to anything, and we will not necessarily offer every option you see listed; it is simply a way for us to gauge interest at this time. It *does not* include questions regarding reopening for public worship. We all long for that time, and yet we trust our Advisory Team, our Staff, and our Executive Team to make those decisions. (At present, those three groups are in unanimous agreement about our benchmark).

As I've said many times before, "creativity is the winner of the pandemic." It's time for us to step outside the box and explore new ways of Being the Church. Our hope promises that this exploration will ultimately strengthen us in our Discipleship, our Faithfulness to God, and our Communion with each other in the years ahead.

This survey also allows you to express that you are just plain tired — with the state of the world, with the balancing act so many of us are attempting, with the emotional uncertainty of the future. All you want is the basic, foundational promise that God has not left you and that you are beloved even now. And so, if that is you, you are not the only one. Please fill out the survey so that we can offer you support, space, or simply a place to vent..

Finally I want to say that it is an absolute joy for the LCC staff to talk on the phone, email, text, and occasionally visit distantly outside with you. From the bottom of our hearts, we want you to know we are here to support you in your faith journey. If you are in need of connection to the church, whether it's from me, Rachel, Ben, or Karen, please reach out to us by phone, email, text, or through the church office.

May you be blessed with hope, creativity, good health, and the promise that you are deeply beloved,

Pastor Joanna