

March 14, 2020 Dear Church Family, Upon further, prayerful consideration, and in consultation with many wise friends and colleagues, including sister churches, we have made the difficult decision to suspend morning worship at SEPC beginning tomorrow through March 29 (at a minimum).^{*} We want to assure you that we are not making this decision flippantly or out of fear. Quite to the contrary, we have made this decision motivated by love — for the members of our community of course, but also for our non-members — in our community and in our country. We fully understand that going without our embodied, gathered, public worship together as a community represents a significant loss. But it is a loss we are willing to sustain for a time for the gain of caring for those who are in our orbit of care, attention, and even acquaintance, most especially the immunosuppressed, those with chronic conditions, and the aged, who are disproportionately vulnerable to the most dire impacts from this dread virus. Given the unknown nature of so much of this situation, we have decided to err on the side of caution for the sake of protective love and a careful valuing of life that God calls us to adore and guard. And in so doing, we are deferring to the judgment of those with expertise in these matters. It seems clear that one of the easiest ways to ameliorate the rapid spread of this virus is to curtail the gathering of large groups. For example, one computational biologist, and Christian, Patrick O’Neill working with New England Complex Systems to fight the COVID-19 pandemic has suggested that at this point: “Given what we know about this outbreak, any large gathering of even apparently healthy people still constitutes a grave public health risk. Already we are approaching the point where there is a non-negligible probability (about 7 percent, according to my estimates, and rapidly rising) that any gathering of 100 people will involve at least one person infected with Covid-19. Therefore, I argue, it is not enough that attendance at large public gatherings be made morally optional; there is a moral duty to avoid even holding large public gatherings whenever possible.” So we won’t be gathering for now out of care for our most susceptible neighbors and in prayerful hope. C.S. Lewis had words in light of the Second World War that may be adapted to our situation: “War creates no absolutely new situation: it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself... . We are mistaken when we compare war with ‘normal life.’ Life has never been normal” (“Learning in War-Time,” *The Weight of Glory* (1939), 21-22). Please note that, despite our decision to not meet together for worship in the morning, we do plan to send you an order of worship and a pre-recorded sermon by Cal that we would encourage you to follow/listen to tomorrow morning, either as a family or

individually. This additional information will be sent to you in another email. Over the coming week, the session and the diaconate will be crafting plans for how to care best for our members, and we will communicate as best as possible about the opportunities to serve. Let us be active in prayer, hope and service. Thank you. It is a privilege to be church with you all.

Yours in Christ, Cal and the SEPC Session

Re: SEPC Worship – April 19, 2020 April 18, 2020 Dear Church Family, Another week of quarantine brings another Sunday of worshiping at a distance. We will gather tomorrow at 10:30 AM together to sing our praises to God, to offer our testimonies of thanksgiving, to hear God's Word preached, and to be reminded of our common bond in the Gospel of Jesus. Enclosed is the bulletin for tomorrow, a link you can use to share your and your families' Thanksgiving, and another link that will send you to our worship together. Let us remember that, while giving up meeting together weekly is a sacrifice, we do this as a way to care for one another and to love our neighbors. Thank you for your ongoing willingness to do so. I am grateful for the love abounding in this church. Please let us know if you have specific needs or if there are particular ways we can be praying for you. For Cal and the Session, Jay