Dear friends,

Words like “unprecedented,” “uncharted,” and “unparalleled” keep coming to mind. None of us – except one Westminster member born in 1915! – has ever lived through something like the coronavirus pandemic.

Our wonderful staff members and church officers are fully engaged in leading the congregation through this uncertain time. If you have not yet worshipped online with us, I encourage you to do so. Response to all the services – Sundays at 10:30 and 5 pm, and Wednesdays at noon and 6 pm – has been positive. Attendance has doubled from a typical week at Westminster. The prayers and music, preaching and silence are meeting a need among our members and in the broader community. I expect the building will be closed and we will continue to worship in this manner at least through mid-May.

Our primary goal through this season of separation at Westminster is to continue to be the church. This issue of the News contains important information about how we are doing that, through an array of online opportunities. Please avail yourself of them. We can be church in new ways; I suspect when this is all over we might find our life together strengthened. I trust that might be the case for you and your families, as well, as you live in this new reality. This is challenging for all of us!

I do think that if we hold fast to our conviction that we are not alone, that God is ever-present, and that love is stronger than anything the world might throw at us, we will get through this. We will emerge from this time to offer an even more vital witness to our faith. Our Telling Presence will be stronger than ever.

Speaking of that presence…we tested the Westminster Bells this past week. When they began ringing, we heard from neighbors by email and phone – and they even came out on their balconies to wave and cheer. The sound of the bells, we were told, offered a sense of unity and shared purpose. They united the community and offered hope.

That is what the church ought to do in every time and place – but especially here and now. These words from the hymn come to mind:

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.  

See you in church – online!

Grace and peace,

[Signature]

Togethe we are the Body of Christ. While apart, we covenant still to be the church. We are not alone. Thanks be to God!

Worship
Sundays Livestream  
9:15 am Adult Ed Hour  
10:30 am Worship  
5 pm Gathered at Five

Wednesdays Livestream  
12 pm Lenten Service  
6 pm Taizé Worship

Livestream link westminstermpls.churchonline.org

Westminster’s building is closed. However, a pastor is on-site daily. Should you need to reach us, call (612) 332-3421.

As always, you may access a daily online devotion at (612) 332-7087. Our pastors and church leaders offer a daily scripture devotion.

Prayer is very important at this time! Send confidential prayer requests and pastoral care needs to Rev. David Shinn at dshinn@wpc-mpls.org. Email dwagner@wpc-mpls.org to receive the weekly prayer email.
Worship and Music
Westminster has made a smooth transition to worshipping via the livestream on Sundays at 10:30 am and 5 pm, and Wednesdays at noon and 6 pm.

We are looking ahead to Holy Week and the creative possibilities that online worship extends. You will still hear the fabulous music of guest instrumentalists and be in wonder of the worship settings that we will design. You may even catch a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Widor Toccata!

Adult Ed Online Classes
Westminster plans to offer livestreamed adult-education presentations every Sunday except Easter through May 10. Join the livestream from 9:15 am to 10:15 am or connect via Westminster’s Facebook page, where you can offer comments to other viewers and pose questions to the presenter.

The Sunday morning presentations will be recorded, archived, and available to anyone who cannot view them live. Connect with us and explore the values and resources we have to foster community in our divided and turbulent world.

Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Being the Church
Sunday, March 29 | 9:15 am
Dr. Matthew Skinner

We will cover how navigating uncertainty, massive change, and social dislocation has been a central piece of the church’s experience since its beginnings. From what the Bible tells us about the difficulties that troubled the first Christian communities, we can cultivate new perspectives and essential communal values to hold us together and help us thrive in the midst of turmoil.

Can We Find Community in a Hostile Crowd?
Sunday, April 5 | 9:15 am
Dr. Guillermo Hansen

In the face of uncertain times, this class will explore how we address community in the face of hostility. The crowd in Jerusalem hailed Jesus on Palm/Passion Sunday but turned brutally to “crucify him” by the end of the week. How do we approach such situations as we seek to create community in a divided world?

Living the Faith in the 21st Century
Wednesdays | 5:30 pm

This online and interactive class explores what it means to live as faithful Christians in today’s world. Contact Chad Quaintance (612) 374.9410 for log-in information to join this group.

Families, Youth, and Children Offerings

When a child is baptized at Westminster, we make a promise “to love, encourage, and support you...” That promise has not changed, just some of the ways we act on that promise have.

What will that look like for families, youth, and children at Westminster?
Matt is reaching out to the youth through the youth group’s Instagram page. Sonja is coordinating Westminster Story Time. Marie is in contact with Westminster parents with modified Family Matters and Moms Group conversations. Meghan is folding children and family into worship and Kasey is extending ministry to our youngest.

Other ideas are underway and we will continue to provide information and updates in our weekly email. Feel free to reach out to us to stay connected as a community (virtually, of course!). Know this: God is with us.

Congregational Life

Our congregational life is shifting in unexpected and beautiful ways during this time. We will continue doing WOW and WestConnect Bible studies by way of Facebook Live and conference calls, and will keep experimenting with how to be together on social media. This will be a wonderful and difficult experiment to see how our community comes together to have fellowship and learning.

Do not hesitate to send ideas to the staff for how we can help bring you into conversation—virtual dinner parties? Another all-church book read? Church member-led video devotionals?

We will find ways to settle into this uncertain time with the sure and certain knowledge that we are all in it together. One this is for sure: God will guide us.

WOW Bible Study
Wednesdays | 9:30 am

We will host our Wednesday bible study of the Gospel of John on Facebook at 9:30 am. Tune in at facebook.com/westminstermpls. Feel free to comment and post questions during the discussion!
Congregational Care

We are still grappling with this new reality of “social distancing.” The expected weekly gatherings for worship, fellowship, and care are now reimagined in the virtual realm.

As you read this, remember the one undisputable fact of our faith: God is bigger than this disease. Psalm 91 tells us that “You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my god, in whom I trust.’”

Reaching Out to Others

Undoubtedly, the church has a vocation in times like this. We don’t yet know what our neighbors will need, but we will be paying attention and seeking to be agile enough to respond as we are able. Stay tuned.

Meanwhile, think about being willing to do the following:

- Run errands for those who are isolated including delivering meals or groceries, medications, or other things;
- Help seniors learn how to stay connected via the internet; be a technology “consultant” for those who are less familiar;
- Make phone calls to those who are especially isolated;
- Visit this link (https://bit.ly/3a8PklA) to view a growing list of the many community resources to help those in need.

One Great Hour of Sharing

For over 70 years, One Great Hour of Sharing has provided Presbyterians a way to share God’s love with our neighbors in need around the world.

In a world of disaster, hunger, and oppression millions of people lack access to sustainable food sources, clean water, sanitation, education, and opportunity.

The three programs supported by One Great Hour of Sharing - Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Self-Development of People - all work in different ways to serve individuals and communities in need. Please give generously and return your offering with the enclosed envelope.

Ways to Give

Westminster is hard at work helping our community cope with the stresses and demands of these times. Your church is offering comfort, courage, and uplifting worship in the face of uncertainty; it is helping youth and elders connect at a time of isolation; it is serving food to vulnerable people at a time of deepest need; and it is providing hope in a backdrop of existential fear.

Even from afar, your support helps Westminster carry out its ministries. We invite you to continue your regular support, via mail, online, Tithe.ly, or auto-deduct. If you are fortunate enough to be able to give extra, please do. If you find yourself in need, please let us know. We are here to help.

Westminster Arts

The upcoming Westminster Performing Arts Series concert – James MacMillan’s Seven Last Words – is postponed. The Westminster Choir will plan to re-mount this remarkable piece later this year.

Arts have long been known as a tool to help people through the toughest of times. Although Westminster’s building is quiet, the arts staff are working on creative ways to stay connected, such as livestream concerts, video devotions, and more. If you have not already, consider signing up for the Arts E-blast to stay up-to-date. Visit westminstermpls.org and click ‘email sign-up’ on the top bar.

Westminster Bells

The installation of the six-bell peal is complete. The Westminster Bells, however, will await the resurrection of our Lord before they play. At the conclusion of worship on Easter morning, the bells will ring out the joy of risen life. Those on the livestream will be able to hear them.

Then, beginning Monday, April 13, the bells will strike the hours at 9 am, 12 pm, 3 pm, and 6 pm, Monday through Saturday. We will dedicate the bells when we return to worship in our building.

The Westminster Chime will play that Monday for the first time. Thank you for helping make the Westminster Bells possible!
Loneliness
by Susan Thornton, MDiv, MA, LP, Westminster Counseling Center

More people in this country are experiencing loneliness than ever before. It has been said that our country is suffering “an epidemic of loneliness.” Loneliness is a universal and complex emotion that is also unique to an individual. It is a state of mind. We long to belong, the need to belong is built into our DNA as animals. If we do not feel a part of a community, it follows that we feel lonely.

Our technology and social media feed loneliness, as has physical isolation, moving to a new location, death, and relationship breakups. As therapists we encourage clients to take a risk to move from their state of mind to form a connection with another person, yet often shame prevents this.

Now our world is suffering from a novel coronavirus with terrifying characteristics. The primary work to prevent transmission and to limit the spread of the virus is to limit social contact with other people. This “social distancing” can increase and heighten loneliness, and make it more difficult to share our concerns and receive social support. Persons with depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges often are already isolated. Avenues are cut off.

We can use technology and social media to build new connections, for example by phone trees, or text circles, Skyping, using Nextdoor. We can prevent further isolation by developing strategies for taking care of ourselves, seeking assistance, and offering help to others. In this way, we build stronger, more resilient connections for ourselves and the wider community.

Westminster Counseling Center is available to our current and new clients during this unprecedented disruption of our daily lives. HIPAA restrictions have been waived so we are offering phone and internet sessions for the duration. We are best contacted through our website: westminstercounseling.org.