**Roxbury Congregational Church**

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

24 Church Street ~ Roxbury, Connecticut 06783

860-355-1978 ~ office@roxburychurch.org

www.roxburychurch.org

*We Are a Community Seeking to Share God’s Love!*

**The Rev. David F. Peters Sandra L. Kleisner**

Minister Minister of Music

david@roxburychurch.org sandra@roxburychurch.org

March 12, 2020

Dear friends,

I write today about matters of the head and heart. With the COVID-19 at our doorstep, it is prudent that we not panic, but prepare and take actions to slow the spread and protect our community, families and friends, especially those most vulnerable. You have undoubtedly heard the many warnings and protective measures that we all should be taking. This is not a time to be thinking we feel well now, so we shouldn’t act now. This virus is different in a number of ways from the flu that is usually present around this time of year. It is more deadly (10X so…) and it is infectious before one is showing symptoms.

The Roxbury Church leadership has been having education and discussions about this and how we are to respond. Here is our thinking and response as of today:

* If you are not feeling well, please stay home.
* Please wash your hands regularly and for at least 2 minutes.
* The Church has placed Hand Sanitizing Stations throughout the building as well as tissues.
* During worship, we are strongly encouraging people to resist the temptation and habit of shaking hands. Other ways of greeting include waving, smiling and voicing a greeting during the Passing of the Peace, touching elbow to elbow, or use the sign language greet of waving your wrists above your shoulders.
* We are also now encouraging everyone to practice “social distancing” while in worship. Please space yourselves out in the meetinghouse and not close to one another. (families can of course sit together) Please leave about 6 feet between you and the next grouping.
* The Deacons for Communion Sundays, will pre-cube the Communion bread. This will avoid having to touch the whole loaf while tearing a piece. The Deacon will also hold the bread and “wine” tray and pass it to each one.
* I and other Called to Care visitors will refrain from visiting elderly members as well as those who have health compromises. This will be replaced with caring, pastoral, phone calls. We care about you still but do not want to add to your problems.
* The church staff will be diligent in wiping down commonly touched surfaces.
* We are asking those preparing Refreshments and other food serving events like Men’s Breakfast to wear food-grade gloves available in the kitchen and to wipe down all food surfaces and tables before and after food service. Gloves dirtied should be changed before handling food again.
* If you feel uncomfortable about attend public worship, we understand and suggest that you watch worship on our Facebook Live Stream. A copy of the bulletin will be posted on our website each week. The Facebook Live Stream begins at about 10:35 a.m. at [www.facebook.com/roxburychurch](http://www.facebook.com/roxburychurch). If you do not have an account, you may want to have one until you feel comfortable or able to return among us.
* Lastly, on a selfish note, I am concerned that if folks rightly choose to take a break from public worship, they may get out of the habit of coming to Church and not return afterward the crisis is over. Please keep this in mind down the road. We will miss you during these days and continue to need you to be a part of the fabric of this vital and vibrant witness in Roxbury and beyond.
* On an even more selfish note… if you feel you cannot be in worship, consider sending in your offerings to the church by mail or register to make your pledge paid online by electronic transfer. We have a very good system here at church that many use and it has really helped over the years to have cash flow for us to pay our bills and fulfill our commitments.

That is the “head” part. I also want to address the “heart” part. At times like these, we are asked to think beyond ourselves to others. We have been told that we could have a mild case of COVID-19 and not even know it and then pass it on to another with disastrous results. All of this information and hype can overwhelm us. For example, we UCC clergy received an email from the Conference yesterday out of concern for us as we deal with this on so many levels. It can be overwhelming.

Fear comes when one feels out of control and when we feel we have a lack of information. We have heard conflicting information which is not helpful and does not calm people. We have seen shelves cleared and price gouging, behavior that is beyond our nature as civilized people. Our sources of information clamor for our attention (and ad revenue from it) to tell us the latest tidbit respun for our appetite.

It is at times like these that I fall back on my faith and its source rooted in scripture. I believe in and worship a God who loves you and me and has given to us the best minds to support us and help us through this. ***“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.”*** *Psalm 46* I hope that you will remain grounded that this virus is not the end but with our cooperation and help, will be over it with the least amount of pain and suffering. Please keep our health care workers, scientists, as well as community leaders (political and religious) in your prayers.

You all remain in my prayers and am available for conversation and your comments.

In Christ’s Spirit,

David