Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus the Christ.

Let me begin by saying, I miss you. I love you. I wish you were here with me in this beautiful sacred space where we are accustomed to gather each Sunday for worship.

On Tuesday, your church staff video conferenced together for our weekly staff meeting. It was a gift to me to see their faces. We prayed for you, for another, for medical professionals, and community leaders who bear the responsibility of leading, serving, and caring for our neighbors in this challenging moment of history.

I shared with them a piece of scripture I’ll share with you now from Mark 4:35-40.

_On that day when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose and the waves beat into the boat so that the boat was being swamped. But he was in the stern asleep on the cushion and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still.’_

Jesus’ words ‘peace, be still,’ speak into this moment of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear that we are facing. We would do well to revisit them often or the story of the angels in the field on Christmas Eve reminding the shepherds not to be afraid for a savior was born unto them. God comes especially near and speaks an assuring word to us in pivotal moments of community life.

Our community life looks radically different today than it did at the start of this month. Our children are home. School is cancelled. Many are working remotely. Regular rhythms of life are extremely disrupted. We have adopted these measures in our homes and organizations out of love for our neighbors-to minimize risk of infection in the midst of this pandemic. Until this pandemic ends, the safety and health of our community is the highest priority.

For the sake of stewarding life and health as best we can as a faith community at Christ UMC, _I am suspending in-person worship, the use of the building, and all in-person programming like Choir Practices, Bible Studies, Youth and Children Small Group gatherings, and Wednesday Night Together, until further notice._
We will practice physical distancing until the threat of this pandemic has passed and honestly, that might take quite some time, certainly much longer than any of us would like.

We don’t yet know when recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control will ease to a point where we can safely gather as the large church that we are. When that time comes, we will communicate in every channel we have that we are resuming a regular schedule.

**How are we handling Sunday worship?** Starting this Sunday, March 22 and going forward, worship will be livestreamed on the church’s Facebook page. [www.facebook.com/christumcfranklin](http://www.facebook.com/christumcfranklin) You can access that page even if you do not have a Facebook account. For now, our livestream service will start each Sunday at 11am central time. This week, you can expect to hear and see members of our ministry staff leading worship just as if we were worshipping together in person.

I encourage you to use this opportunity to share our livestream with friends, neighbors, and coworkers whether they are in Franklin or halfway around the world. We have an opportunity to extend the reach of Christ UMC through this new method of worship.

If you aren’t able to catch a service live, a full recording of the service will later be posted on the church’s website.

**How are we handling virtual groups and committee meetings?**

Because the building is closed and physical distancing is a best health practice, regular committee meetings like Finance, Trustees, Outreach, and others are not meeting in person at this time. However, videoconferencing through Zoom is a technology tool that is available to use. It’s how we held a staff meeting this past week. I encourage chairpersons of committees to conduct their business meetings with Zoom. I encourage small groups, Bible study groups, and Sunday school classes to meet through videoconferencing. We have incredible technology at our fingertips that can aid our ministry.

Our ministry staff is exploring ways that video can create ways for us to pray, learn, study, and fellowship together in Christian community. New opportunities will be shared through our church newsletter and on our social media pages.
If you are a group leader and would like to explore the use of Zoom, our staff can assist you with that. We also have congregants who are particularly skilled at using Zoom in their workplaces that can assist you with this new tool.

**How can I give to support Christ UMC’s ministry during this time?**

Every month on the 18th, my pledged giving to Christ UMC posts on my bank account. It doesn’t matter whether I’m traveling, sick, forgot a check at home, or don’t have any cash in my pocket at church. I use our online giving portal with a regular reoccurring gift as a spiritual discipline of giving. In this time while we are not gathering in person, I encourage and ask you to do the same. Of course you can still mail checks to the church’s physical address and Michael Deweese will handle them appropriately. If you don’t already, you can give online at [www.christumcfranklin.org/give](http://www.christumcfranklin.org/give). If you need help setting up online giving or to set up an automatic draft with the church, please email Michael Deweese at [michael@christumcfranklin.org](mailto:michael@christumcfranklin.org) or call at 615-790-2112 extension 225.

If you are able, would you maintain your regular practice of giving during this pandemic? Christ UMC is still supporting its staff, outreach partners, and ongoing expenses such as insurance, Internet access, and cloud-based access to our church database so we can maintain operations remotely.

I know that investment portfolios are not stable. Reduction in work hours and the closing of some businesses are making a major impact on your family’s income and budget. Giving may not be possible for some of you because conditions have changed. That’s okay. We anticipate some reduction in giving as this pandemic evolves—I promise you that we are limiting ourselves to only essential expenses to live within our means.

**What if I need pastoral care?**

This past week, our team also began an initiative to be in touch with a majority of Christ UMC households to check in. Staff and volunteers are calling, texting, and emailing to see how you and your loved ones are doing in the midst of this pandemic. If you have a particular need for assistance, please don’t hesitate to share that. We also have volunteers at the ready who are willing to assist, particularly in assisting vulnerable adults who need to remain physically isolated at home.
As always, our pastoral staff is on call to support you in this difficult time. If you need to speak with a pastor, you can call the church office at 615-790-2112 extension 4 and leave a voicemail for the pastor on call.

Allow me to conclude in this way:

In every age, the Christian church has had to find new ways to serve and love the world, in the midst of plague, war, persecution, and global unrest. The body of Christ lives and adapts as conditions change. That is the work currently confronting our community. I believe this pandemic very well may be one of the greatest defining moments of this generation and a major opportunity for Christ followers to practice costly discipleship in the 21st century. Our story of faith in Christ is the word that can soothe the anxiety, fear, and worry that is no more than an arm’s reach away from any one of us. I encourage you to be steadfast in faith, assured that God in Jesus Christ will see us through our collective suffering.

Lastly, remain the selfless, compassionate, and generous people of Christ I know you to be. And may the blessings of God Almighty, through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you and your family.