



August 26, 2020

Dear Friends & Members,

We are living in a new day. I feel a bit like the Prophet Isaiah when God used him to carry the message to the Israelites: *"Behold, I am doing a new thing"* (Isaiah 43). The Hilltop Church Council voted at our August meeting to suspend in-person worship at the end of this month and remain online through the remainder of 2020. This is the best way to love our neighbors and reach people for Jesus at this time. For the past five months, we have been continually monitoring, adjusting, experimenting, and adapting to the changing environment of what church looks like during a pandemic. Plans are currently underway for what the children and youth programming, Connect Groups, All Saints Sunday, Advent, and other church activities might look like in this new day. Some things are still uncertain even as I write this letter, so the Council will continue to monitor, plan, adjust, and adapt as necessary in the coming months.

The uncertainty and loss of "what was" can cause us anxiety and difficulty. I know we miss gathering on Sunday mornings, praising God in song, a cup of coffee with unmasked conversation, and the warm embrace of friends. I miss all of those things too. We will be doing our best to provide a digital church experience where the Holy Spirit can meet us online, in our homes, and wherever we find ourselves during the pandemic. I know digital ministry is not the same. Yet, I'm reminded of the early Apostles who struggled to guide each other during difficult circumstances. As the Apostle Paul writes: *"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."* (Galatians 6:9-10)

To that end, I hope you'll connect with God and with others in three new ways in the coming months.

**1. Pray.** The church needs your prayers now more than ever. If you've not been praying for Hilltop on a daily basis, now is a good time to start. Please pray for INNOVATION as we seek ways to do church differently. Pray for INFLUENCE in our community and neighborhood. Pray for the Holy Spirit to IMPACT people's lives in and through us (see the New Day prayer card included with this letter).

**2. Download the new church app on your tablet or smartphone.** On August 30th, you'll be receiving an email from the church inviting you to download the new church app called Realm Connect. This app will help you have all the resources of the church at your fingertips. If you're not a smartphone or tablet user, that's ok. Information is always located on the website. This is just one more way to stay connected to all that is happening at Hilltop.

**3. New Connect Circles.** You've heard of Connect Groups, you've maybe even attended Connect Academy, and in the coming months, we'll be launching Connect Circles which is another iteration of how we can stay connected during these difficult times. This is not a class or a study. It is everyone in the church placed into a circle with a coordinator who will be connecting with everyone in their circle. More information about this will be coming later this fall (around October/November). If God is leading you to help "care for others" at church, please let me know as you might be a great connect circle coordinator.

I look forward to a time in the future when there will be another new day, one that includes embracing, sharing in fellowship, and joyful spirited singing. Until that time, thank you for your continued support. There are many new ministry items on the horizon and your generosity and faithfulness are helping Hilltop continue to be a vibrant Christ-centered online community.

A passage of scripture that I've been reading frequently this summer sums up to me where we find ourselves. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart."* (Hebrews 12:1-3)

We will not grow weary or lose heart because **Best of all! God is with us.**

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