



*Letter to the Congregation re The
Corona Virus Pandemic*

March 12, 2020

Dear Friends,

I am sure all of you are concerned about the Covid 19 virus and its impact on our lives. Here at the church we are monitoring the situation and responding accordingly. As I said yesterday, things are moving very quickly, so we will share what we know now, and as we have further details, will share them, too. Please let's all be patient and gentle with ourselves and others: it can be a stressful time and we're all doing the best we can under challenging conditions.

As of today, here are the changes to our congregational life:

1. **Sunday Services.** Starting this Sunday March 15, worship services will be live-streamed on our Facebook Page, the [Unitarian Church in Westport](#). **There will be no in-person worship.** As of now, the ministers will hold our services at the church while recording and streaming live. An order of service will be forthcoming.

If you are not yet a member of

our church Facebook page please click [HERE](#). Then Click on “join” and you will immediately see that you are following the page.

We know our first service will be a learning experience. We will improve both our capabilities and expand on our order of service as we learn on the job.

2. **Music Programs.** At this time, we will not have choir practices or performances on Sundays. Likewise, the concert services planned for this spring are postponed until further notice. Ed and I are working closely on ways to bring more music to you remotely, as we know for many of us music provides special comfort and strength at times like these.
3. **Meetings and Classes.** All in-person Faith Formation classes, committee meetings, groups and other events are cancelled for the time being. That said, I encourage groups to meet online. ZOOM can be an excellent platform; FaceTime or iMessage or What’sApp can work well for small groups of 3 or 4. Please refer to the Appendix of this letter for further information on these

possibilities.

4. **UU Players.** In consultation with Jim Luongo the director of our UU Players Group, we are postponing The Evening of One Act Comedies scheduled for this weekend. This was a difficult decision to make but we felt it was simply the most prudent action to take. We hope to reschedule these at a later date.
5. **Online Caring Network.** At times like these, when we are asked to stay physically apart from each other, it can be difficult – and yet very important – to stay connected with one another, and be supported whenever and however we can. This is especially true for those of us who are in high risk groups, who must be quarantined, or who live by themselves or in isolated places.

Accordingly, we are launching the [TUCW Caregiving Support Network](#) that is enabled by a technical platform called Lotsa Helping Hands, that many churches use. This will be our system to make sure all our congregants are getting the care and help they need, for example: grocery shopping,

pharmacy pick-ups, rides, meals delivered, personal phone calls to chat and catch up. This will enable us to appropriately respond to all of our people evenly. Beth Cliff is coordinating this for now; she welcomes a few others to help her lead this effort; contact her at uuchurch@uuwestport.org if you're interested. More importantly, to sign up to be part of this ongoing network of helpers – not as a leader, but as an active participant - please click [HERE](#).

6. **Let Us Help You.** If you are in need for physical support as mentioned above, or are lonely, or feeling especially at a loss, we invite you to let us help you. Asking for help is actually a gift to the giver in that we are putting our faith and our covenant, into practice: "Love is the spirit of this church and service is its law." You may find yourself in self-quarantine unexpectedly, or your usual networks of support are not available. Please contact me directly if you or someone you know in our church is in need: 203.227.7205 ext 12. Alternatively, let one of our chaplains know by either calling them at 203.227.7205 ext 19, or sending them an

email; you can go to our website uuwestport.org and find them on the site and send a confidential email.

If you are living alone or in quarantine this crisis is very scary. Let's not go it alone. Please reach out.

7. **Ministerial Care.** The Ministers are available at any time to listen and provide support. We can call or, in certain circumstances, visit if necessary. I will be sending out short videos with words of hope and courage several times a week.
8. **Stay Connected.** Our Communication Team will be posting regular updates on our website, through Soundings, Facebook, Instagram, and by email every week. If you are in need of access to any of these channels let us know and we will get you connected.

I want to thank our incredible staff for all their hard work moving so quickly to a remote way of being in community. Charles and Jenny Klein are working overtime under Beth Cliff, our Communication Director, who is a fount of knowledge, ideas and technical expertise. Our Intern Minister Margalie Belizaire just so

happens to be on staff with the Church of the Larger Fellowship and she has direct experience with how to "do church virtually." She, along with our larger UU and Interfaith communities, are actively sharing tips and knowledge. We are far from alone.

Finally, I want to say how much I appreciate how our leadership has stepped up to the challenge before us. We are so loved and in such good hands. One of the most amazing results of almost any crisis is how it forges new bonds of fellowship and strengthens the mission of any organization. We will survive this and, I believe, we will grow in new and unexpected ways. Ironically, we may find ourselves more together in this crisis than we could imagine being so separated physically.

Pledge drive still on and closes March 31. I would be remiss as your leader not to take this time to remind all of us that we are in the midst of our annual budget drive. While the timing is admittedly tough, we are still counting on all of us to make a pledge for the next church year starting July 1. Recall that full payment is not due until June 2021. If you have not sent your pledge in, please tell us what you are likely to give by pledging directly [HERE](#) or by going to our [website uuwestport.org](http://www.uuwestport.org) and clicking on the **Building an Abundant Community** logo.

When deciding on what to pledge please imagine a time beyond this moment when we are stable once again; or imagine being able to use incredibly state-of-the-art technology to make virtual meetings, concerts and worship services a new, regular part of our church life and outreach in the community. You can always adjust your pledge if circumstances dictate at a later date.

I am here for any and all of you. Feel free to email, text or call me.

I offer you this parting thought which has been something of a guide star for me in recent days:

"The extent of the struggle determines the extent of the growth. The obstacle is an advantage, not adversity. The enemy is any perception that prevents us from seeing this." -- Ryan Holiday

Stay well and stay in touch, Rev. John

APPENDIX

ABOUT ZOOM

ZOOM is an easy, on-line platform which many churches use to connect with each other virtually. We have a church license and can make that available for groups of up to 100. It

can include video, share documents and screens, and record for later sharing and reference. It is very intuitive to use.

If a leader does not have a ZOOM account they are welcome to use the church's account. You will need to email Diane our administrator to schedule its use and obtain log in credentials, just as if you were reserving meeting space in one of our buildings.

Facetime or iMessage can work easily for small conference calls of 3 or 4 and would not need a prearranged timeslot. Test it out with a family member: it's easy – dial one person, then dial in another before you hang up on the first person ...

I encourage everyone to download the ZOOM app (<https://zoom.us>) onto their computer or other device so that if you receive an invitation you can join a meeting without delay. Each ZOOM invitation will come with a dial in option so you can join the meeting by landline phone if you anticipate connectivity/bandwidth issues or if you don't have easy access to video.

See below for an easy guideline about connectivity. Also note that Margalie will run two ZOOM trainings on Friday March 13 and Saturday March 14 for those who are interested – same content, two time slots. One of them

will be recorded. See Facebook or Soundings WeekEND for details.

For general ZOOM log-in info for any call, see below:

ZOOM LOG-IN INFO

SOFTWARE DOWNLOAD: <https://zoom.us>
Free software is available for PC and Macs, computers, tablets, and smartphones.

Note you may not be able to log-on to a specific call until the scheduled meeting time - it depends on how the host has set up the meeting - but you can load the software and be ready.

Once you've received the ZOOM invitation, there are three options to participate:

1) VIDEO: Click the highlighted link for the session. The software will prompt you if it is ok to open, click ok. Once the window opens, choose whether to connect by computer speakers or by calling in (not both!).

2) SMARTPHONE: Copy and paste the 'one tap mobile' into your dial screen and press call when you're prompted. You will be automatically connected - it will put in the meeting ID for you.

3) PHONE: Dial in using the number, enter the meeting ID when asked.