



# buzz

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## A Pastoral Word Before Easter

“Not going to church on Easter? That just feels wrong! There’s nowhere else we belong more to celebrate Christ’s resurrection than in church!” Have any of you, like me, said or thought something like this after you realized that our current Indiana travel advisory for the Coronavirus would extend beyond Easter? For Christians, Easter is the high point of the whole year and the pivotal biblical event centering our faith. Although Holy Week and Easter Sunday are always tiring times with long work hours for pastors, to us it’s the main event, the energy and (literally) the lifeblood of the church itself.

Many of us don’t know how to put into words how disappointed and sad we felt and still feel. No early morning bundled-up gathering to sing and pray in the Remembering LIFE Garden! No preservice singing of favorite Easter hymns! No yummy Easter brunch when we often get to see friends and family members we haven’t seen in a long time! No special greeting each other in the halls with “The Lord is risen!” and “The Lord is risen indeed!” No joyous gathered worship service to culminate this special morning! Unfortunately, this year many of us are headed toward Easter feeling as much lament as anticipation.

Amidst this lament and expected disappointment have come some remarkable ways that, through technology, our congregation has not been totally fragmented and disconnected. I am profoundly grateful to those who have made it possible for almost the entire congregation to share in a worshipful time together while still sitting at home. A special thanks to Shawn Stutzman for masterminding the coordination of these audiovisual details. I thank God for the foresight, flexibility and creativity of many of God’s people here to make these remote worship times possible.

Of course we all want to return to “normal life” in church as soon as possible, and for those keenly missing their Waterford brothers and sisters, it might

have sparked a little hope last week to hear our president speak of having Americans back in their churches by Easter Sunday (a direction from which he later withdrew). But as Christians our eyes must follow a much higher horizon than self-interest and group-interest when we consider whether and when we will get back together to worship. In light of such conflicting messages, I was inspired and encouraged by an article in *Sojourners*, written by Melissa Florer-Bixler, pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church in North Carolina.

In her article, Florer-Bixler provided me with an emboldening prophetic response to the possibility of a premature return to gathered worship while the Coronavirus pandemic is still spreading. She writes, “I can assure Donald Trump – my church will not meet on Easter. To do so, to risk the spread of coronavirus, would be a denial of my faith and a perversion of our communal worship.” To her pastoral insight and resolve, I say a hearty “Amen!” She recalls a comparable biblical story of national crisis for ancient Israel, which demonstrated God’s view of religious activity that perpetuates suffering and injustice. Florer-Bixler continues, “In Isaiah, worship that endangers others is described as an abomination, a weariness to God, ‘solemn assemblies with iniquity.’ Those who continue to worship in a way that brings harm to those who need protection – they have blood on their hands (Isa 1:15).” For the whole article, go to <https://sojo.net/articles/i-refuse-participate-worship-leads-devastation>.

So while there is sadness at our Easter isolation, the fundamental joy and hope of the Easter event is not diminished in the least by a threatening epidemic. We will not risk the health and safety of friends, families and strangers by physically regathering too early. But we will, nevertheless remain a socially and spiritually connected faith community. Thanks be to God!

— Pastor Neil Amstutz



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## A Message from Ministry Leadership Council

As you know, Covid-19 has presented the world with new and unprecedented challenges. Globally and locally, we are experiencing a very different daily normal. As families, we have more time in our homes with one another, and we think carefully about leaving the shelter of our homes. Some of us are learning new technology in order to meet in groups, rather than jumping in our cars to get together. Here at Waterford we now realize as never before that our physical building is not the church. **We the people are the church!** And we must find new ways to express our faith and care.

1. Livestreaming Sunday morning worship requires flexibility, creativity, and effort on the part of both the participants and the listeners. Worship Ministry team and pastors will continue to work on ways to improve it.
2. Pastoral care by phone, Facetime or Zoom at this time is not the same as in person, but it protects our pastoral team as well as those who receive their calls.
3. How do we be church when Waterford folks are facing crisis? Medical personnel face a new reality of risk and workload. Teachers and students miss their daily personal interactions and feel challenged with online learning. Isolation, fear and vulnerabilities impact people in different ways. With God's help, we will also find new ways to be a church family making a difference in our community.

Last Tuesday, March 24, MLC met for our monthly meeting using Zoom. We agreed on the following important points:

- MLC affirmed delaying Neil's sabbatical by two or more weeks in order to reduce the chance of travel restrictions at the end of his time away. The sabbatical, as of now, is planned

for May 3 – August 10.

- With the end of April being the end of Waterford's fiscal year in the midst of Covid-19 health restrictions, MLC is recommending Facilities and Finance Ministry Team bring a cautiously optimistic 2021 budget that has no increase from this current year's budget. Due to the Covid-19 disruption, we have planned a May 17 congregational meeting for budget approval.

Thanks to all of you for your participation in WMC and its mission. Please let us be patient with one another as we experience congregational life in new ways. If you have ideas or needs, please let our pastors know.

## Thank You

Waterford Mennonite congregation,

Thanks much for your continued support of the E3-Survival Skills of Life Program! Your support enables us to keep connecting with young men who need God's light and love to shine into their world.

Saturday, March 14th, we held a Pi Day event for E3 grads who are now in high school, and it was such a joy to reconnect with them and catch up on what is happening in their lives! One is a shift manager at the Dairy Queen in Middlebury...One works at Wal-Mart and has dreams of studying nursing at Goshen College. It makes me smile to listen to them and see the hope in their tone of voice and on their faces. Thanks for helping us help them to change the trajectory of their lives!

May God richly bless your congregation in the midst of these uncertain times. Thankfully, we have confidence in the One who holds the future in His hands!

Shalom,

Cheryl Mast, E3 program coordinator