

To the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo, members, friends and family  
From your minister, the Rev. Ben Meyers  
RE: A Faithful Response to the Coronavirus: Suspending Sunday Gatherings at UUSM

Dear Beloved Community,

**I am writing this letter to inform you that we will NOT gather together onsite for the next few Sundays, but rather we will broadcast our service remotely, and provide online opportunities for small group ministries, committees and other gatherings, wherever possible.**

***Please read this letter as to why...***

We are facing an unprecedented challenge in the form of the potentially lethal virus called COVID-19, creating uncertainty about what to do or what information to follow. As a beloved community we turn to one another to calm our fears and provide a loving presence of care and compassion, to bring both solace and strength during difficult times. This is what we, collectively, do best within our UUSM spiritual community of *'open hearts and open minds.'* But knowing what best to do for the whole is not always clear, and not always easy. There is no one 'best' decision in the chaotic unknown of what looms. We are being challenged to find new ways to bridge spiritual distances that the required physical and social distances may create.

The challenge of this Coronavirus demands that the leadership and staff of our religious community minimize the impact of this virus among our multi-generational congregation and the broader community. We must exercise responsibility for the safety, health and wholeness of our entire community and beyond, without being unduly alarmist or fear-based in our decision-making. I, your board leaders, and your dedicated staff have spent hours in discussions, in focused research, in dialog with health officials and medical experts, with clergy colleagues and denominational leaders, and in conscientious thought, prayer and discernment. We have fully considered all sides of this issue.

**Our discernment leads me to inform you that we will NOT gather together onsite for the next few Sundays. For now, we will be suspending all non-essential gatherings and, instead, either postpone, or offer these remotely...more details will be forthcoming as we make the necessary technical arrangements. *Please read on...***

We have not come to this decision lightly. The Rev. Erica Hewitt recently wrote about the tough decisions made within a religious community like ours:

*Our communities are being tested for their tolerance of uncertainty, as well as for how much grace they choose to extend towards the leaders making these high-stakes, but values-driven decisions...I believe, moreover, that the most ethically-driven decisions prioritize the most vulnerable members of any given community. Moral decision-making hinges not on the "I" and not even on the interconnected web of "We", but on the most fragile strands in the web."*

We need one another, especially in times like these. It is a given that we benefit greatly, and that we are healthier, when we make human connections that are, themselves, a blessing and a source of health and wholeness for us. Something essential to our very humanity is missing when we are unable to meet together and form real connection. We strive to make our UUSM sanctuary and campus a safe place for all, but we do not want to be a place where anyone is exposed to this virus, or made unsafe. We are taking this precaution in order to care for *'the most fragile strands in the web.'*

We believe this is the best decision in order to be in compliance with San Mateo County Health officials. ***\*Please see below.***

As essential as meeting together in beloved community is to us as a religious community, I believe it is incumbent upon us to also love our neighbors as ourselves and refrain from gathering, in-person, until the threat of the virus abates. Our decision is to do our part to slow the spread and lessen the impact of the virus, especially on those most vulnerable.

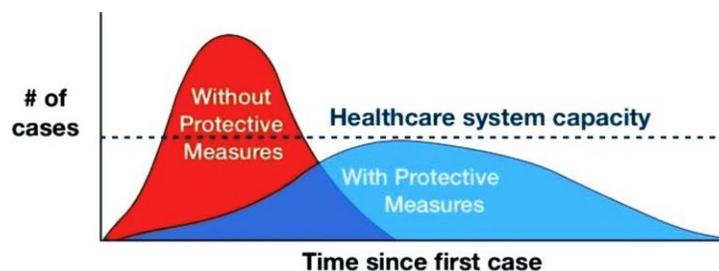
***Further instructions about our remote assemblies will be forthcoming...  
PLEASE BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THIS INFORMATION FROM UUSM!***

And yes, there is still much we can do to care for ourselves, spiritually, during this time. First and foremost is to remember that although we may be promoting social distancing, we can never diminish the spiritual connection we have for one another. We are an interconnected web and we can use other tools to remain connected. And, in the interim:

- Practice gratitude for all the blessings you have;
- Pray for the most vulnerable in the community;
- Contribute to agencies and organizations that offer just and compassionate action and support to the most vulnerable;

We are a community of faith: we have faith in one another and faith in a love greater than ourselves that will not let us go. Stay centered on that faith, and on that love.

Ben



*Adapted from CDC / The Economist*

\* Here is an excerpt from the San Mateo County Health Office:

*Our lives will be significantly disrupted by the measures needed to respond to a global pandemic. A pandemic is a global occurrence of an infectious disease. A pandemic is a disaster with unique characteristics. The two most important differences between a pandemic and other disasters are that the whole world is going through this disaster at the same time, and people may become fearful of other people. The current COVID-19 outbreak clearly has the potential to turn into a severe pandemic.*

*County Health continues to work with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and our state and local partners to manage testing and monitoring of persons who have been exposed to COVID-19. **But our focus is rapidly changing from a containment strategy (identifying cases and contacts) to one of community mitigation—taking steps to lessen the broad impact of the disease.** County Health and our public and private partners are taking steps to increase our ability to respond and are planning for a sustained response to COVID-19.*

- *All non-essential gatherings should be canceled, postponed, or done remotely. Unfortunately, at this time, I have no standard definition of “non-essential” or “gathering” to guide your decisions. Use your best judgment.*
- *Stop shaking hands.*
- *Increase the amount of remote working or teleworking to the extent possible, especially for those who appear at higher risk for developing the disease, those over the age of 60 and those with compromised immune systems.*
- *Under all circumstances, stop touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth with your unwashed hands.*