

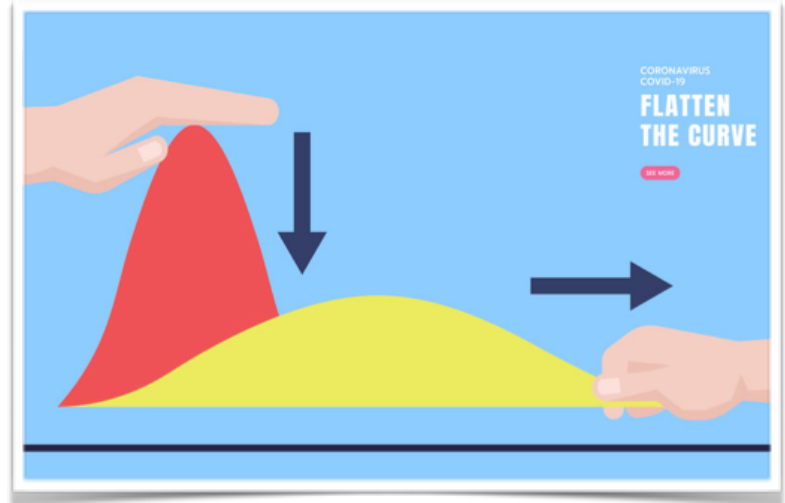
NEWSLETTER

After We've Flattened the Curve...

Then what? Everyone's expectation is that the coronavirus shutdown will end *someday*. The question isn't when, but how.

And so this pastoral update is aimed at first glimmerings of how First Church might come back to life, in the flesh.

Before I get to those glimmerings, though, I'd like to invite you to share your wisdom, and plans. Many of you work for, or have some other regular connection with organizations and businesses that are planning re-openings.



We would be interested to hear how they plan to prepare physical spaces, workforce, and customers and clients for when the doors open again. No tip is too small, or plan too elaborate, that we would not benefit from it. So please share.

As for First Church, before people flow back into our spaces, there are some preconditions:

1. We need to implement State and local government requirements for “non-essential” public spaces and buildings.
2. We need to couple government standards with our own rules of the road, tailored to our congregation, and also to the other populations regularly moving through our buildings (Houghton College, Village Church, Explore Buffalo, etc.).
3. We must devise a thorough plan, and implementation protocols, not only for opening the church, but for maintaining sanitizing and social distancing practices for the long term. We also need to anticipate a resurgence of coronavirus and identify the circumstances that might cause us to curtail activities or to close the church again.

All of that sounds pretty formidable, and even discouraging. It's not meant to be, and it certainly is not beyond our capacity to take these steps. The good news is that none of us should be caught flat-footed again by COVID-19. While there still is much we don't know about the disease, we know enough to take



Lily Garden

Easter flower dedications are a beloved tradition at First Church. Many expressed their disappointment in not being able to participate this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are pleased to announce that we have found a way to bring Easter lilies into the life of our church this year, and for years to come!

Thanks to the generosity of Women’s Association and the Wadsworth Family, 50 lily bulbs have been purchased and will be planted on the Wadsworth Street side of the building this spring. Every summer when they bloom, we will be reminded of new life in Christ and our cherished moments as a church family.

We will post updates on our website and Facebook when the planting begins!

sensible precautions against its proven transmissibility and lethality.

Many churches point to a “hybrid” future, which means retaining some of the digital alternatives to worship and gatherings that have become standard fare over the last six weeks. Here are some other ways the “re-convened” church might change:

- Some may find they enjoy worshipping at home, in PJ’s and sweats.
- Some don’t feel safe in public places anymore, and don’t like masks, hand sanitizer, and 6-foot separations.
- Some will prefer the freedom to watch services on their own schedule, and on their favorite viewing device.

On the other hand, many will be happy to return because...

- They miss physical connections with other believers, and are weary of spiritual and social isolation.
- They want to resume ministries important to them, in Christian Education, in mission, in worship leadership and participation, among others.
- The shared experience of the coronavirus crisis, with its enormous costs measured in so many ways, may instill a greater sense of religious, social, and community commitment.

As I said, these are some first glimmerings, offered up to spark your thoughts and your reactions. How do you view the church as it emerges from a time like no other in our lifetimes? I’m eager to hear what’s on your hearts and minds.

Blessings, *Ken*

Prayer from the Upper Room

Wednesdays at 6:00 PM Dr. Hughes offers a sacred time of prayer and reflection online while he sits in the “Upper Room” of First Church—the Amos Callender Meeting Space. All are welcome to join.

Meeting details are emailed each week, and a phone options is available. Contact Ken with any questions.

“We're in this together!”

by Rev. John Long, Parish Associate

This encouragement I hear and see over and over as we all face the life threatening pandemic. It's said in the face of isolation, staying home, masking, keeping six foot distance, which are required. It's said in the face of medical danger; and medical statistics, in the face of how many have been infected, hospitalized, intubated, died!

This encouragement is happening as masks are made and given by people who sew, as birthdays are celebrated with car parades, church services are online, meetings done by Zoom, restaurants closed but making meals for first responders and medical staff, when groceries and prescriptions are delivered or taken to your car. Bus drivers and farm workers are essential! Even our Tuesday church food bags are important.

Buffalo is a town that has welcomed immigrants and refugees, going back centuries, and now with resettlement agencies and VIVE's ministry and shelter. Jericho Road, born out of the medical practice of one man and his wife, provides medical care without regard to cost at several sites in our city, but also at two clinics in Sierra Leone, one in Congo, and motor bike medicine in Nepal!

We are in this together with those whose situation is much more severe than our own: refugees in camps crowded together with no place to isolate, older and disabled folk in assisted living facilities, people in VIVE's shelter, in the local jail, in state or federal prisons. Many jailed in the time of this pandemic are non-violent offenders who could not make bail! The federal detention center for immigrants in Batavia has cut its population in half to about 300, but more than 50 are infected with the virus, second only to the most infected at San Diego!

When we look beyond our community, even our state and country, to the world-wide nature of the pandemic, we are in this together with persons and families in Latin America, and Africa, even in islands in the oceans. No inhabited place, no population in the world is unaffected. We are in this together with all the world. And all before God. It is God's gift of life, of healing, of care that will provide a future for all the world. That's what we are all in together.



Food Pantry

The Lyon Food Pantry is close to the heart of our congregation. It is remaining open as a vital mission during the current coronavirus health crisis, and is being operated by the church staff.

As needs have increased, adjustments have been made. The number of bags available weekly have increased from 20 to 30. We are able to provide toilet paper and feminine products. Hand soap and hand sanitizer are a frequent request and some weeks we have been able to distribute those items.

To help this important ministry, monetary donations to the Lyon Pantry Fund can be made securely on our website.

Prayer List

During this time of quarantine have gathered our prayers on our website — an ongoing list that is updated daily. Submit yours to email@firstchurchbuffalo.org.

1918

by Christina Banas

This year may feel like one of the most challenging in First Church's history, and there's no denying that it is. We are unable to worship in our beautiful sanctuary because of a virus; people are laid off or have lost their jobs because the economy is shut down; and children are not allowed to go to school. Strange times, indeed. But First Church has been through a lot in its 208-year history, including a previous pandemic.

Curious to find similarities between the 1918 Spanish Flu outbreak and the current Coronavirus crisis, I researched the church records from that year. It turns out that we may not have it so bad today—1918 was a *terrible* year for First Church!

It began with the globe still at war in the final year of World War I; peace was not declared until that November. February 15, 1918 minutes record a motion from the Women's Circle that no fresh flowers be ordered for worship "until normal times" (referring to the war). It's certainly likely that sons of First Church were actively fighting.

Then on April 5 the beloved pastor, Rev. Andrew Van Vranken Raymond, D.D. died, and it appears to have been unexpected. The cause of death was not indicated. Needless to say, the congregation was devastated. Those who endured the passing of Rev. Dr. Phil Gittings in 2016 can empathize with how the congregation must have felt.

So what about the pandemic? There is only *one* mention of it in all of 1918's records. At the November 6th regular Session meeting, the Clerk noted:

"The Moderator called attention to the fact that the recent closing of the Church on the following Sundays: October 13th, 20th, 27th, in observance of the proclamation of the Mayor (Elder Buck of the First Church) issued because of the influenza epidemic, was the first time its doors had been closed on Sunday since the service was resumed in 1815 after the war of 1812."

I plan to continue this research and dig a little deeper, but perhaps by the time the congregation endured a world war and death of a pastor, a pandemic barely made headlines.

Tower Update

by Dr. David Bond

The remaining work in this phase of the tower is slated to be done sometime this summer. The work cannot happen until the restrictions on contractors has been lifted as it will require two people on site. The remaining work is primarily on the south side of the tower (towards Wadsworth Street), up near the bottom of the belfry openings. They will need to use another very large lift which will require that the ground is considerably dryer so that it doesn't get stuck in the mud. Consequently, I don't anticipate they will do the work until late July or August. I will keep you posted.

Thank you

by Dr. David Bond

Thank you many times over for all the text messages, phone calls, emails, and cards I received while I was in the hospital. It meant a great deal to me. And I feel wonderfully overwhelmed by the offers of food and other care should I need it. It has been wonderful to see that this congregation lives and acts its faith so completely. I've been home just over two weeks and recovering very well. I am still self-quarantined for the most part as my condition leaves me a bit more vulnerable than normal. And many thanks to those of you who've gone shopping for me or dropped off other goodies. You may not see me but you'll hear that I'm around.