



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of FRESNO

2131 North Van Ness Boulevard, Fresno, CA 93704 | [www.bigredchurch.org](http://www.bigredchurch.org) | 559.227.8489

Dear Church Members and Friends,

In response to COVID-19, my and the Church Council's highest priority has always been the health and safety of our whole church family, as well as the wider community in which we live. While we understand and share the sense of urgency to reopen, and the impatience of sheltering-in-place longer than we first thought, health and safety remain our highest priority. We will continue to gather online and will not resume in-person worship or gatherings through at least the end of June. The Church Council, informed by the Health and Safety Task Force, will continue to evaluate this pandemic and the appropriate precautionary measures. The national setting of the United Church of Christ and the Council of Conference Ministers have also offered pastoral guidance to churches to "wait until ALL safety concerns have been addressed." Our services, updates, and resources, are always available at [bigredchurch.org/digital-sanctuary](http://bigredchurch.org/digital-sanctuary).

One surprising gift of this moment is how we can experience familiar texts and teachings in new ways. Throughout the Easter season, the biblical texts in our online worship have illustrated the intimacy of our relationship with God. While this has been particularly poignant during our physical separation, it has reminded me that the care we show for one another reflects and informs our relationship with God. Another text we might approach with renewed vision is our "Open and Affirming Statement," adopted by The First Congregational Church of Fresno in 1996:

*"We believe that all people are sacred creations of a loving God. We affirm the diversity that exists among us. We strive to answer the call of Christ by extending his love, compassion and acceptance to everyone. In this spirit, we open our family of faith to people of every religious background, sexual orientation, family composition, physical and mental ability, race, age and gender.*

*As Christians, we experience God's reconciling love. In response we stand with those who suffer discrimination, isolation and alienation.*

*We welcome all people to participate fully in our church's life and ministry. We celebrate the variety of talents and perspectives which flow into our spiritual community, continuing to enrich us in ways we could not have predicted or envisioned."*

While this was written to express The Big Red Church's full welcome and inclusion of our LGBTQ+ siblings in faith, it was written in a spirit that articulated God's invitation despite whatever lines, barriers, and distinctions we may use to divide ourselves from each other. Today, this includes all for whom it is still too great a risk to gather in person.

Our whole community is essential, but even in "normal" times, our church is not bound by the property lines at the corner of Van Ness and Yale. Our church is you, our people; and the faith, love, and hope that we share as a church is reflected in every place our church members might be. I urge you to continue to find and rely on compassion as the best way we understand and live in community with one another. Everyone is facing difficult decision they have not had to make before, including our politicians, business owners, frontline and essential workers, and all individuals and families. Let us not exacerbate today's divisions with judgments and moral superiority, but seek instead to show how the abundant life of everyone held together in the love of God is possible, even in a time such as this.

Please check in with and find creative, heartfelt ways to connect with your neighbors, individuals at higher risk, those who are already dealing with difficult life circumstances, and those who live alone. Our Food Pantry is available Tuesday-Friday from 10am-3pm. If you or a loved one need support, assistance, or pastoral care, please reach out to me by email, the church office, or my cell phone (listed in the church directory).

Peacefully,  
Pastor Raygan

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