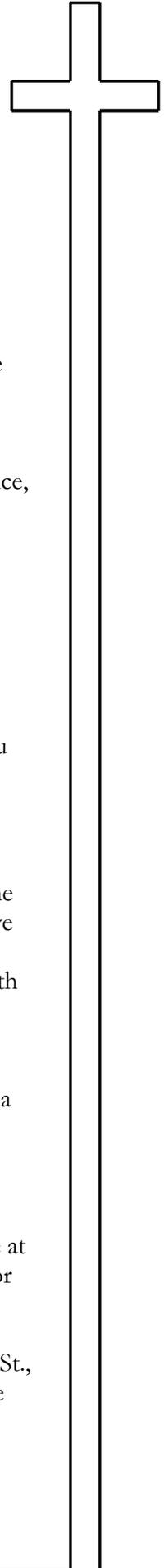


# THE REFORMED CHURCH OF PORT EWEN

P.O. Box 580 | 160 Salem Street | Port Ewen, NY 12466

Reverend Kevin Slusher  
kevin.slusher@rcpe.info  
(845) 331-2782



02 April 2020

Dear Reformed Church of Port Ewen,

I apologize that this is so long! I wanted to take this opportunity to communicate to you some recent decisions the consistory and I have made.

- ❖ Worship services and all other activities at the church will continue to be suspended indefinitely. We believe this is the best and most faithful course of action. It is a sacrifice, but one that we believe is required of us as we sacrificially love one another, and the most vulnerable among us.
- ❖ We will continue to provide you with in-home worship resources for Sunday morning worship and for Wednesday Morning Prayer. For those of you without access to the internet, we are only able to get the materials to you for Sunday morning due to the amount of labor and time involved. We regret this.

You should be receiving emails from us (check your spam folder if not!) but we also invite you to check our Facebook page and/or our website ([www.rcpe.info](http://www.rcpe.info)) as well, where all of this information is provided.

## ***Holy Week***

This Sunday, April 5th is Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. Some of you have been asking what Holy Week will look like for us during this time. Here is what we would like you to know:

- ❖ We will continue our new “normal” and keep our current rhythm of providing you with in-home worship resources Wednesday and Sunday morning.
- ❖ We will provide a short service — a reading and a prayer — for Maundy Thursday via email and on our website.
- ❖ We will provide a Good Friday liturgy, with music recordings, for your use in-home via email and on our website.

## ***Tithing***

As we have said previously, we know that for many of you, the economic impact of this crisis will be felt in significant ways. Please do not feel pressured to give, or guilty if you cannot give at this time. If you are in need of financial assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to Pastor Kevin or one of your deacons. We can help you find resources.

If you are able to give, we encourage you to mail your checks to the church office (160 Salem St., Port Ewen, NY 12466) and mark the outside of the envelope ATTN: Mike Kinsch, so that we know where to direct the envelope!

We are also working on an online giving platform on our website. We hope to have that going in the next few weeks!

### ***A Note on Communion***

This Sunday is the first Sunday of the month and we would usually be gathering together around the Table to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And next Sunday is Easter, where we would again gather to "keep the feast," proclaiming our Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). Your consistory and I, during our weekly check-in via Zoom video conference call, talked through a host of options, including inviting everyone to celebrate the Lord's Supper at home.

***Instead, we would like to invite you to join us in fasting from the Lord's Supper during this time.*** While there is no right or wrong answer, we think that fasting is a faithful and a fitting act of sacrificial love.

Jesus is asked in the Gospels why his disciples do not fast like the others. He replies: "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day" (Mark 2:19-20). Jesus was telling them that while he, the bridegroom, was among them, they would feast. But he also warns that there will be a day coming when Jesus would go away, when he would ascend again into heaven, and we, his followers, would fast once more. We feast at the Table in Sunday worship when we are together in order to celebrate that Jesus is with us in the power of the Spirit. It is also a foretaste of the day when we will be with Jesus once again, feasting forever in heaven with him. But in this time when we are physically separated, similar to when Jesus said he would physically depart from the disciples, we thought it would be appropriate to fast from the Table.

Communion signifies our communion with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, and our communion with one another. It is the *visible, embodied* enactment of our unity as the body of Christ. In communion God takes what is tangible, physical — grains of wheat and the juice of grapes — and actually feeds us. The sacrament of communion is inherently a physical, embodied, tangible act. As we are apart, while "the body" is scattered, maybe the faithful thing for us to do is to abstain from communion until we are together again? In this way, we would all be united in solidarity as we share in a fast together.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 to chastise the Corinthians church for celebrating communion in an unworthy manner. He says that he is hearing that there are divisions among them. When they were celebrating communion, some were being fed while others were being denied and going away hungry. Many think that because the church gathered in the homes of the wealthy benefactors at that time, that it is highly likely that the wealthy were feasting in the inner rooms of the house, while the poor were being fed the leftover scraps as they waited in the outer courts. Paul tells them that in doing this they bring the judgment of God on themselves. They are making a mockery of the Lord's Supper. Paul tells them to "discern the body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). Division and separation, some being fed while others are going away empty, is the exact opposite of the reality of what is happening at the Table of Jesus. In the Lord's Supper we are not meant to be divided, but we are united as one in Christ.

What does it mean for us to "discern the body" during this time? We believe it is to invite you to join us in a fast from the Lord's Supper. While it is not wrong to do it in-home by yourself or with

your family, we think that until we can all be together again as one, until we are all able to have equal access and gather at the Table, it might be more faithful to abstain and fast from communion.

The way of Jesus was the way of sacrificial love for the least and the last. Jesus did not think of himself, his own rights or needs, but instead chose the way of sacrificial love. And we are invited to do the same.

We know that this is different and that it feels like we are being asked to sacrifice a lot during this time. And we are. There is just a lot of loss in all of this. It is okay to feel angry and/or sad about that. We are tempted to try to mitigate that, to do things that make us feel like we are not losing so much. But we want to invite you to take what we think is a more faithful path: to sit in the confusion, the anger, the pain of what is being lost. To not look away, but to name how much it hurts. To bring your pain and sadness before God. And to recognize as we go this way that we are taking the way of the cross: we are dying to ourselves, in so many new ways, in order to find our life together again on the other side in Christ. The way of the cross hurts. The way of self-denial is costly. Much is being asked of us in this time. But in it, as we go the way of the cross, we find life with Jesus. That is what the coming celebration of Easter reminds us: in Jesus, death leads to life.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions or if you need someone to talk and process what is going on in your life. We are here for you. We love you so, so much. God be with you!

In Christ,  
Pastor Kevin (on behalf of the Consistory)