

## Essential Faith

As faith leaders serving communities throughout the Tahoe Basin, Truckee, and Carson City, we are first and foremost grateful for our wider community of faith: our congregations and those who participate in all our programming. We are also grateful for each other. Our formal and informal gatherings enable us to learn and grow together in our faiths. During the last weeks of navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic, our trust in one another and our ability to share time--virtually--has and will continue to be a source of inspiration. We engage in conversations about virtual strategies and opportunities; we support one another in our grief and yearning to be together with our communities physically; and we partner to support our vulnerable neighbors. The work the faith community has done to support social service agencies and organizations has been immense, it has been inspiring and it will continue moving forward. Yet, the most powerful part of our coming together to commiserate and share ideas is knowing that we are not alone in recognizing the need to refrain from physical gathering.

Yes, many have called for religious gatherings to resume, and we understand, trust us. We, of all people, understand the desire to gather and the grief associated with missing one another. Yet, it is incumbent upon us as faith leaders to sift the immense amount of public health information and to follow the science and the medicine. It is also imperative that we uphold our most sacred shared value: the value of each and every human life. With these two guiding principles, using science and medicine and honoring the value of life, we know that our obligation is to keep our faith communities open--virtually--and to keep our buildings closed and refrain from faith gatherings of any size.

While there are many pieces to this decision, we'd like to share a few. First and foremost is the reality that there is a lot we do not yet know about this virus and the disease it causes. Some of the restrictions have changed and yet the scientific and medical data about physical gatherings has not. Second, we as faith leaders, together with our congregational leadership, do not yet see a way to live our traditions of physically gathering in community *while* observing physical (social) distancing practices. In other words, the amount of screening and disinfecting necessary, the lack of interaction possible, and the vulnerability of many members would be

significant barriers to meaningfully and safely gathering for worship, for fellowship, and for living our faiths. Third, we firmly believe that we will not only keep connected through virtual tools, but we will learn new ways of enhancing and expanding the fabric of our communities during this time. Much of this has yet to unfold, and we'll dream and vision together!

As a collective voice of faith in the Tahoe, Truckee, and Carson City region, we know that faith communities *are* essential. And, we know that physical gathering is not necessary in this moment to live our essential functions and mission. This is our view and will be our practice *NOW* and we know that our reality is evolving too. May the Mystery of Creation, the Divine Inspiration, continue to be part of all of our lives, and may our togetherness in this moment lead to possibility in the future!

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Reverend Clare C. Novak, Interspiritual Minister and Counselor

The Very Reverend Jeffrey Paul, St Peter's Episcopal Church, Carson City NV

The Reverend Sarah A. Dunn, Rector, St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, Incline Village, NV

Pastor JJ Tuttle, Lead Pastor, Connected Nazarene, Carson City, NV

Unity at the Lake, South Lake Tahoe, CA

The Reverend Diana Turner, Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra, South Lake Tahoe, CA

The Reverend Bob Kelley, Lake Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church, South Lake Tahoe, CA