

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

We have not seen our granddaughter, Addison, since this whole national shut down began. Let me qualify this statement. We have seen her thanks to the miracle of FaceTime. Most days, our daughter, Erin, is kind enough to call us so we can see Addison's smile, her endless energy, her surprising love of books, and perhaps soon her first attempts at walking without the assistance of furniture. Needless to say, Margo and I miss her very, very, very much. Each night I find myself scrolling through pictures of the cutest granddaughter in the world 😊, wondering when we can actually see her again.

This is one of the struggles of staying home during this coronavirus pandemic. We can not be with each other in the same way. Maybe one of the positive effects of this strange time is a reminder of what is truly essential and most important in our lives. It isn't shopping, our homes, fancy cars, or any other possessions, but rather people – family, friends, neighbors, even coworkers. People are why I feel an ache in my heart right now. I miss my mom and dad, our son, Michael and his fiancé Sam, our daughter Erin and her husband Parker, and of course, 10-month-old, Addison.

Truth be told, I miss all of you too, the people of University Lutheran Church. I miss seeing you Sundays and Wednesdays at worship, fellowship, and midweek suppers. I miss seeing you at Bible study, church meetings, or when you just stop by the church office. Of course, during this time it has been a lot of fun to connect with some of you on Facebook, the phone, emails, or when you make a quick stop at church, but it's not the same. So, I have rediscovered how essential my relationships with my parents, my wife, my children, my grandchild, and with you, my church family, are to me.

There has been a lot of talk about what is essential during this pandemic. Amidst this crisis, what is an essential service or business? Who are the essential workers? Certainly, police, fire, and ambulance services are always essential. Plus, people who are providing medical care in the midst of a pandemic are essential workers. Now, government officials have identified other businesses like grocery stores, department stores, gas stations, liquor stores, certain manufacturers, as essential businesses. Yet isn't it interesting that in our modern world the church is rarely if ever deemed essential.

I hope God doesn't mind! I actually don't have a huge point to make here. We are all just figuring out this idea of what it means to live through a pandemic. Furthermore, I have grown more accustomed to American culture continuing to push the church to the edges of contemporary life. Having said this, I hope and pray when all is said and done, that while we will forever be grateful for all the work essential people did through this pandemic, we will also change our language in such a way that recognizes that no person, no legitimate service or business, including the church, are non-essential.

Recently, I was watching a news report. It was about how people are coming together during this time of the pandemic. One report I really liked was a video of Italians out on their balconies each evening and singing together as a neighborhood. Next, it showed George Harrison, the lead guitarist for the Beatles, encouraging people across the world to sing the Beatles song, "All You Need Is Love." On a sentimental level, I often agree with this. However, on that day I must have been doing my best impression of being a curmudgeon, because I grieved for a world struggling to see what they really need is God.

So, what I feel called to say before you today is this. Most essential to me and my life is my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is more essential to me than Hugo's, Target, Walmart, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, food, or anything else. In fact, the Lord is more essential to me than even my life itself, because when my life in this world is complete, I belong to him alone. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, as we sometimes call him, is essential personnel, so to speak, and He alone is the one who will heal us and see us through this time of the coronavirus pandemic.

After the Lord, what is most essential to me, of course, is family and friends, neighbors and coworkers, and also you, people of University Lutheran Church. In fact, the reason I miss Addison so much, the

reason I miss my family so much, the reason I miss all of you so much, is because she, they, and you are essential to me and my life in this world. Even those of you who I know less well are essential to me. You are my family. Together, we are a faith family. I can hardly wait to see you again, and to worship alongside of you again, whenever it is the safe and right time to do so.

You are in my prayers,  
Pastor Tom