Dear Friends,

Since my family's departure at the end of July, I have missed the fellowship, love, and support of our Emmanuel family dearly. I wanted to write [today](https://webmail.myfairpoint.net/) with some thoughts for the annual meeting upcoming this Sunday. I ground my thoughts in a most comforting passage of scripture:

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.  And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

I want to commend all of you for the care you have taken to reopen Emmanuel in this very confusing time in the life of the church and of the country. The demands of love balanced with the challenges of navigating this time are great. I am seeing this acutely both in my work among you and in my work here at St. John's in Cold Spring Habor.

I don't know if this resonates with you all, but the challenge of caring for one another and the church that means so much to us all can be a complicated balance. While our commitment to the institution of the church may feel urgent, with its attendant demands of altar guilds, flowers, readers, ushers, and intercessors, it pales in comparison for extending care and love for one another. This must be our primary vocation. If our institutional life is devoid of love, our witness is hollow. In fact, the demands of caring for the institution grow our of our primary vocation of caring for one another. Our church is called by God to be a community of mutual care and concern as a witness to God's abundant love for the whole world.

I think that we have done this well in many commendable ways. I know that my family and I have been the recipient of great care and affection from all of you. I know that grounds have never looked more beautiful. Our website and newsletters tell the story of our faith in loving ways and extend our love to a much wider community that is not defined by geography. I know that our embrace of universal masking on Sunday has been complicated, but a great witness of love to all those for whom COVID-19 vaccines are unavailable or ineffective. I know that our community partners have appreciated our snack support and our hospitality to the Walden School musicians has been mutually beneficial.

I also know that many of us are concerned for the health and wellbeing of the institution of the church as well. For many of us, waning participation in our service ministries, or even in Sunday church, seems like an alarm - and it may be. But how we interpret this alarm is vitally important.

The alarm that is sounding may signify that for some of us life in this moment has become overly complicated. It may be that adding church to an otherwise stressed life is just too much. It may signify that the demands of our lives are pulling us in too many directions. It may signify that some of our people may need a break - even from the church. Perhaps our most loving response is to let that be, but not to assume that they have let us go. If we can lovingly accept that this time is complicated, anxious, and difficult without adding to the complication or increasing their or our own anxiety, we will be acting in love.

Could we improve or tools to allow greater access to sign-up, of course. Could we improve our communication so that more people are aware of the opportunities for involvement? Of course. Can we welcome anyone who seeks to be involved in the life of Emmanuel Church, of course. But we cannot manufacture interest. We cannot coerce affection. We can welcome, nurture, and love one another and all those whom God has called into our community without reservation and trust that with God's help, we will thrive.

St. Francis is supposed to have said "preach the gospel at all times, use words when necessary." Our primary witness to Christ is our life, not just our Sunday morning confession. In every season, God is with us and the vitality of our witness must always be grounded in love - love for one another, love for the church, love for the community God has entrusted to us. This is the source of our health and our strength and with God's help, we will thrive in the future as we have in the past.

Let us not lose sight that our time horizon is eternity and that caring for one another is caring for the church. If we attend to that, we will be following Christ and the peace of Christ will be nourished in our hearts and in our community.

Faithfully yours,

Gideon