

COVID-19 UPDATE – 3/13/2020



Dear Brothers and Sisters

Considering all that has happened this last week and the many questions and concerns we all have about the COVID-19 virus and its effects on our community, our church, and our families, I thought I would send out an update to let everyone know how Community Chapel is going to respond.

What is the Situation?

The news seems to be updating us hourly with another closure, another infection, and another video of people walking through empty supermarkets aisles. I'm sure there are many in our body right now who don't even agree about the severity of this crisis. It's difficult to make decisions when so much is still unknown and you're not even sure which information you're getting is accurate and trustworthy. In a situation like this it's important to figure out what your priorities are and focus on what is most important.

Right now what is most important to the leadership of Community Chapel is the spiritual, emotional, and physical well being of the members of our church and community. At this point, with limited testing and conflicting data from countries infected earlier than ours it is very difficult to know what our current state is. Officially there are only 17 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 0 deaths in North Carolina with no confirmed cases in WNC (these numbers can change hourly). However, considering how few people have been tested and how mild the symptoms may be for younger people, we really have no reliable way to know how many people may or may not truly be infected.

What we do know is that we're being encouraged by almost all of the public health officials in our nation and in the world to follow specific protocols to limit the spread of this pandemic. Wash our hands. Sanitize when possible, cover our coughs and sneezes, and try not to touch our faces. Seek treatment if we feel symptoms and stay home when we're sick. Finally, consider limiting large public gatherings. The message has been clear and consistent and it's important for all of us to heed these warnings as best we can.

Don't be Afraid. Be Wise, Be Considerate, and Be Faithful

I know it is difficult to be not be afraid or anxious right now, especially after watching the news or spending time on Twitter and Facebook. Some of us may be experiencing serious or crippling fear. Others are feeling anger and frustration by the panic and believe that this is all overblown. As Christians we have a better answer when we face times of crisis and confusion, we have God's Word.

1 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

This is a time for us to rely upon God's promise and use the gifts that His Holy Spirit has given to us. As we trust in God's sovereignty in our own lives we need to be looking to others and consider how God would have us express our faith during this time.

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I believe first we must act in love. Lisa and I and our children are not in a very vulnerable demographic for COVID-19. We are younger and relatively healthy and if infected we will most likely have mild symptoms or a bad flu. Outside of the economic impact and disruptions to our day to day life, we're not in very much physical danger. However, there are many people in our family, in our church, and in our community who are over 70 years old, who have respiratory issues or compromised immunity, or have some other high risk condition that makes infection potentially fatal. It is out of love for those people and concern for their well being that I am following the precautions and preventions recommended by public health officials. I know there are those who think this is just a panic, no worse than the flu, and who feel like they're not in any danger. That simply is not the case for people who we love and care about who are in these high-risk categories. We should love each other enough that if we're feeling any resistance to these recommendations, this love will allow us to humble ourselves and follow the protocols out of concern for those who may be more at risk than ourselves. Loving others is what we're supposed to be all about.

I believe we must act in wisdom. Right now the leadership of the church is praying, gathering as much reliable information as we can, and discussing the appropriate and responsible actions we need to take in order to serve our church. Our prayers have been very direct, "Lord, what is best for our church and for our community." We are going to outline some changes below that reflect these prayers and conversations. We have done our best to exercise Godly wisdom and faith and I would ask that you would please consider how difficult many of these decisions are and extend our leadership team as much grace as possible. Some may think we've done too little and others may think we've gone too far. Please know that while we've taken this very seriously, we are fallible and it's a near certainty that we will not make perfect decisions. I am humbly asking you to help us by supporting our decisions as best you can, expressing any disagreement to us in a respectful and loving way, and to extend a full measure of grace to those who have taken on the responsibility of leading this body. We strive to discern God's will, to use Godly wisdom, and to remain in unity throughout this crisis.

I believe we must act in power. This one is simple, we are armed with the power of prayer. Please do not forsake our greatest weapon. Join us in prayer and petition for one another and for everyone in our community. Not only will it benefit the people we love and care for, it will benefit you as well. Please pray and love others by praying for them.

What Actions Are We Taking?

As of this moment Community Chapel will continue with Sunday services. This may change if the situation continue to escalate. However, we will not be holding our bi-monthly fellowship luncheons and preparing and serving food for the time being. We'll continue to monitor the situation and make decisions about meetings and gatherings as the information and risks present themselves to us.

This week, Sunday March 15th, will be a little bit different because of our planned annual meeting. We do not want everyone to be at church through a normal service and an annual meeting without lunch and with extended childcare. So, for this week we'll be having a shortened time of music and study and then we'll begin our annual meeting after this briefer worship service. The plan is to try to keep this service and meeting within the constraints of our normal weekly service times so that children's service does not have to be extended and everyone will get out at about the normal time. In order to do this we'll need to begin promptly and I hope everyone can make a concerted effort to get to service on time this week, at 10:30am.

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Following are a couple of other announcements about upcoming events. If you have any questions or concerns we can discuss them at the meeting this Sunday or you can reach out to me personally by phone or email:

- **Women's Study** – We will be having the women's study this weekend at the Gowe's home beginning at 10:30am.
- **Men's Meeting** – Wednesday mornings and Thursday evenings will continue for the time being.
- **Seder** – We will not be holding a large Seder gathering this year. We discussed many possible options and it's our hope to still hold some kind of celebration on the evening of Friday, April 10th. We are going to take a couple of weeks to see how things are progressing and then decide what this will look like at that time or if we're still able to proceed with any plans at all.
- **Ohana Groups** – We still intend to begin Ohana Groups in the month of April but it's possible that we may push them out another month if things escalate.
- **Youth Group** – Again, we're planning on holding youth group next week but keep an eye out for any updates.
- **Pre-Teen** – The next meeting is a couple of weeks away, we'll make a determination as it gets closer
- **Carolina Village** – Michael is going to discuss our ministry there with the people at Carolina Village. Because of the increased risk at the retirement community, there is a very good chance we will have to cancel the next meeting or two. They may already have restrictions in place. The next meeting is a few weeks away and we'll determine at that time after speaking to them.
- **Prayer Meetings** – We're going to discuss holding a couple of prayer meetings over the next several weeks. In addition to a need in our ministry for a dedicated time of prayer, it's especially appropriate during a time of distress like we're experiencing now.

We Support Your Decision & We Want to Help

While these are the positions we're taking as a church everyone has to make their own choices regarding when they feel it is safe to attend services and events and when it is not. I want to make this point VERY clear. If you feel it is unsafe to attend gatherings and services, please do not feel compelled to attend. If you are in a high-risk category, or if you would like to limit your exposure for any reason, we understand and support you. Please don't put yourself in what you feel is an unsafe situation because you "have to go to church".

Please just let us know if you're staying home for a bit and if you need anything. We want to be sure that even if we experience more self-isolation and quarantines that we're making an effort to stay connected as a church and help to bear one another's burdens.

Also, please be considerate if people are going to show some reluctance while greeting one another. I know we are a church that loves to fellowship and there are a lot of hugs and physical greetings happening on Sunday morning. If someone is placing a little more physical distance between themselves and others or would like to forgo hugs and handshakes for a time, please respect their wishes. Please do not take this personally and know that while you may not feel at risk they may have a condition your unfamiliar with or family members they're trying to protect. It may seem odd or awkward at first but we should get used to the statement "oh, I'm not hugging right now" and move on with our interactions without a second thought.

Final Thoughts

I know this has been a long message but I thought it was important for everyone to know how we're handling the public health concerns that are dominating our society right now. I am confident that we can continue to grow together as a committed fellowship and become stronger through this time instead of allowing it to separate us.

We will be discussing some proactive plans for ministering to anyone in our body or who is made known to us in our community who does contract COVID-19 or ends up in a self-quarantine. We want to be able to provide help to anyone that we can through prayer, shopping trips, meals, or anything else that we can in a safe and appropriate way. We'll be covering this on Sunday morning.

And one final warning, be considerate of others and take seriously how dangerous this virus can be to people in high-risk categories. If you are sick PLEASE stay home. We love you and we'll be happy to minister to you if we can but you should not be coming to service. If you serve in ministry we will find a way to fill that need for that week or two or three, just let us know. If your kids are sick, please do not bring them into children's ministry and allow the spread of this virus, or even just the flu, to people who can be seriously and even mortally injured by it.

If anyone has any concerns about anything in this message or anything related to the virus or to the church please feel free to call or email me. I'm happy to discuss it with you, pray with you, and help in any way I can. I love you all and pray for God to continue to provide all that we need to weather this storm. Paul told us that when we are weak, God shows Himself strongest in our lives. It's my hope that we can pray in the power of that promise and trust in God to come alongside of us and show us His presence and His power through these next several weeks and months.

May the Lord Bless you in His Abiding Love,
Pastor Larry

Isaiah 43:1b

*Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
You are Mine.*