

March 17, 2020

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update

Dear Friends and Members of CPC,

On December 23, 1776, the newly declared United States of America was in a perilous situation. Their revolution against the British was teetering on the edge of disaster. A brutal winter was setting in. Despair was easy to come by, and hope was hard to find. In that milieu Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." We face a crisis of a different sort, but one that is no less trying.

By now you have heard or seen the increasing responses of local, state, and the federal government to this public health crisis. As the church of Jesus Christ, we are wrestling with the best way to honor the Lord in such a time as this. We hear clearly the commands to "honor the Sabbath" (Ex 20:8-11) and "not neglecting to meet together" (Heb 10:24), among others. And yet we also want to love our neighbor well (Mk 12:31, Gal 5:14), and this includes taking all prudent steps to preserve life (Ex 20:13, see also WLC 135, 136). We are also taking seriously our obligation to obey our civil authorities (Rom 13). As we weigh all these pieces, the Session has determined that we have been "providentially hindered" from meeting and has decided that we need to follow the guidelines of the State of New Jersey and the CDC in suspending our in-person public worship services until further notice.

Does this mean we will not be worshipping as a church on Sunday?

No. We live in a different era than our forefathers when it comes to public worship and pandemics. One of the blessings of technology is that we can continue to meet virtually. This solution is less than ideal. But a global pandemic is less than ideal. We are preparing a livestreamed worship service for you to follow in your home. Lord willing, we will be streaming the service through YouTube and through the church's website. We will post a modified order of worship on the website that will include the lyrics for each hymn. And then we ask that you and your family gather in your homes to sing the Word, pray the Word, read the Word, and hear the Word.

What about those who don't have internet connections?

We don't have a good answer for this. We can offer whatever technical assistance we can. If you have questions about the technology aspect, please let someone at the church know. We'll help troubleshoot this with you as best we can. If you don't have access to the internet, then perhaps you can join with a family that does. We do not expect anyone to come to the church for worship. If you feel you must, please contact one of the Pastors to get approval. We'll make those decisions on a case by case basis.

How can we prepare for something like virtual worship?

Pastor Chris will be sending out a short field manual that details some of the steps for you and your family to take in order to be ready for online worship. Be on the lookout for it, and reach out to one of the Pastors if you have questions.

What about all the other activities for church?

We have worked out some really exciting opportunities for Bible Study and Sunday School.

Providentially, a few weeks ago Pastor Chris secured approval for CPC to receive non-profit status with Microsoft. This means we have access to their full suite of Office software. One of those programs is Microsoft Teams. This allows for videoconferencing with up to 250 people. These can also be recorded and watched later. Our plan is to host Women's Bible Study live on Tuesday evening at 8:00PM. You can access that meeting by [clicking here](#). We are also going to continue with our adult Sunday School but on Wednesday evenings at 8:00PM by [clicking here](#). We will also post these links on the church's website.

How do I use Microsoft Teams?

When you follow the links to the meetings, you will be taken to a Teams website. Follow the directions. On a PC you'll have the option to download an app or join through your web browser. Either is fine. On a Mac it will direct you to download an app or use a web browser other than Safari. Follow the directions about enabling your microphone and your webcam. Once in the meeting you should see the Teacher/Moderator and whoever else is already logged in. Mute your microphone. There is also a chat/text feature. As the class is going on, you'll be able to type any questions or comments you might have. Then the Teacher can unmute your microphone or answer directly from your text. I think you'll find this to be a really great tool.

These will also be recorded and if you miss a lesson, you'll be able to go back and view it later.

How long will this last?

We have no idea. The CDC is recommending 8 weeks. We will prepare for this to last that long but will monitor the situation as it progresses.

This is great and all, but I'm still struggling with some real anxiety over this whole thing. What resources can you provide or direct me to?

That's a great question. And we understand. Pastor Donny and Pastor Chris and the rest of the church leadership are developing a series of reflections on dealing with anxiety, worry, and fear. We hope to be posting this on the church's blog and social media accounts in the next few days. Our plan is to post a new article every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday until this crisis is over. These will also be good for you to share with your neighbors and friends who are also struggling with anxiety, worry, and fear in a time of pandemic.

The Elders and Deacons-elect will be taking the church directory and dividing it up to make a touch point with all the members. It will also give you an easy contact with the church in case you need anything. If you are or you expect that you will be facing financial difficulties as a result of this, please let us know. The sooner we know, the better we can plan and budget for this. If you end up quarantined, please let us know. If you need something and cannot get it, please let us know.

We are also evaluating procedures concerning our regular offering. Not meeting in person means there will be no regular offering collected. We will update you soon about the best way for you to continue giving to support this ministry. We are entering a period of time where the church will have a fantastic opportunity to minister to those in need. Please continue to generously support the church.

These are times that try men's souls. But as I mentioned in the sermon last Sunday, we have no reason to panic or fear because God has given us all things (1 Cor 3:18-23). The world, life and death, the present and future all belong to God, and through Christ he has given those things to us. We are "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8:37). These times can pull back the veil and reveal the futility of our idols. But that is good news in midst of uncertainty and crisis. The comfort we find in Christ is the only comfort that will last.

I want to leave you with a brief note that Doris Bjornsen sent out to a few ladies (and a couple of lucky

pastors) in the church on Monday. It sounded the perfect note of sobriety, faithfulness, and encouragement. With her permission, I shared it online and it clearly resonated with a number of people. I hope you are encouraged by it as well.

Growing up, I often heard my Mom and Dad speaking about the Spanish Influenza of 1918. My Mom (12 years old) and Grandmother actually had the Spanish Influenza, and the impact of that time and disease left a deep impression on all of them. They recognized not only the brevity of life but also the sovereignty of God. Although they could have died, as many did in their Norwegian communities, God was merciful to allow them both to live to 93 and 103! My Mom in later years embroidered a saying in Norwegian "Sikker I Jesu Arme" -- "Secure in the Arms of Jesus." This embroidery hung in our home while I was growing up, and now is here in my house. It was and is a reminder that God is Faithful, Loving, Unchanging even in the changing, unsettling circumstances around us.

*Let us keep each other in prayer, trusting our Heavenly Father.
"Secure in the Arms of Jesus"*

In Christ and on behalf of the Session,

Pastor Donny