

Dear Friends at New Life Church,

Two weeks ago, on March 1st, we read and reflected together on James 4:13-17, a passage which includes these words: “you do not know what tomorrow will bring.” I didn’t mention it in that message, but in my rough draft notes there is one word I wrote down as I was brainstorming possible situations where the truth of those words would be relevant. That word was “Coronavirus.” Last week, as the virus spread, we shared with you that this was an unfolding situation and that we were aware that it could impact our operations and gatherings. We just didn’t know what tomorrow would bring.

On Thursday, the North Carolina Governor issued a recommendation against gatherings of more than a 100 people, and subsequently local news reported that Brunswick County officials had made the decision to close the senior resource centers — including the Brunswick Center at Calabash, where we gather for worship — to the public on Monday in efforts to control the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As a result of these recommendations and decisions, the Sunday morning worship services of New Life Church at the Brunswick Center at Calabash set for this Sunday, March 15th, will be canceled, and future Sunday services suspended until further notice.

There are a number of reasons that the members of the Session (aka, the group of elders of New Life Church (NLC), composed of Terry Maner, Buff Andresen, and John Stark) arrived at this difficult decision:

The limitations on gatherings and closing of senior resource centers are part of an effort to limit the spread of the virus, and we feel that it’s important that we work in partnership with, and not against, our neighbors for the health, safety, and welfare of our community. Slowing the spread of the virus helps prevent outbreaks from overwhelming the capacity of our health care system. We believe that we demonstrate both loving neighborliness and responsible citizenship when we work with our local partners in limiting the spread of COVID-19.

In all of the CDC communications about COVID-19, those listed as being “at risk” are “older adults [generally defined as 60 or older]” and “people who have serious chronic medical conditions (like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease, etc.).” All deemed to be at a higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 are urged to “take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.” Our NLC congregation, as well as our surrounding community is composed primarily of people who fit into one or both of those categories. The most responsible action that we can take as a congregation to reduce that risk for those in our NLC family, as well as our surrounding communities, is to suspend our corporate gatherings until the threat has passed.

We are disappointed that we will not be able to gather together on Sundays for an unknown time period. One of the ironies of this situation is that this past February our average attendance was 109, believed to be a record attendance average for the church (both before and after we became NLC). NLC is in the midst of a season of growth and vitality, a season in which God has been generously giving us growth (1

Corinthians 3:5-6). The fruitfulness and unity in our church is evident, seen in so many ways as people use their various gifts in partnership with one another in response to the good news of the gospel. It would be easy to become discouraged at a time like this, to worry that a flourishing momentum will be stopped by this unanticipated turn of events.

Do not lose heart. In fact, let's look at this as an opportunity to demonstrate our dependence upon God, our gratefulness for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit among us. Think about it this way: what if God has built us up and strengthened us in preparation for just such a time as this? What if, instead of worrying about lost momentum, we see this as an opportunity to grow in the midst of adversity? I will, Lord willing, say more about this in this week's message (details below), but my point is that, with God's help, this obstacle can become an opportunity for our church to shine like a city on a hill.

In lieu of our gatherings, my plan is to post a recording of this week's message on our website (<https://newlifechurchcalabash.com/sermons-media/new-life-sermons>) by 9:30am on Sunday morning. Just as you have had access to our weekly sermons after services each week, this week I'm looking to record and post the message on Sunday morning so that you can listen to it as part of your devotions that day. Instructions for listening to or downloading the message are provided on that webpage. We'll keep you advised as we explore options for continued worship and discipleship under these conditions.

Our elders, deacons, deaconesses, staff, and small group leaders will all in various ways seek to be in communication with you during this time. Small group leaders will be contacting their various members to discuss what those groups will do. Please watch your emails and go to the website for updates. As you interact socially with others in the church, your neighborhood, your family, at work, etc., please follow the CDC recommendations (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html) regarding hand washing, social distancing, etc. and do what you can to support continued efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you have any needs during this time, due to other circumstances or due to the impacts of COVID-19 in our community, please contact the church office at 910.664-4901 or contact Pat or Terry via the "Contact Us" link on the website, <https://newlifechurchcalabash.com/contact-new-life-church>. Feel free to contact me at terry.maner@newlifechurchcalabash.com. This is, as you know, a fluid situation for our community, and it is a fluid situation for NLC. We appreciate your prayers, your support, and your partnership in the midst of it all.

Blessings,

Terry Maner
Pastor, New Life Church

**Additional note, Friday, March 13th, 5pm: After arriving at our decision to cancel and suspend services and communicating that to our church family, we received communication from Brunswick Senior Resources, Inc. Friday afternoon requesting that "church congregations leasing their buildings for church services suspend services for the time being." We will continue to cooperate with BSRI and local officials in determining when we will be allowed to resume gathering again.*