



## WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTIAN CHURCH

March 13, 2020 (UPDATED March 14, 2020)

WCC family,

First, know that the shepherds and staff are praying for you, our city, our nation and our world. You may be tempted to just skim this email. We humbly ask that you do not. Clarity of communication in times like these will help us all. So please, read this carefully and slowly. There will be more to come, but in shorter forms. As for this one, we need to be clear and offer it in written form. Our hope is we accomplish that goal.

This letter has the following five components:

1. An Introduction
2. How We are Reorganizing our Sunday Gatherings for Now
3. Other Information to Come and How We Will Communicate
4. Words of Encouragement and a Prayer
5. A Word from our own Dr. Dawn Muench, a Pediatrician, an Infectious Disease Physician, and Former Military Physician

### **Introduction**

As you imagine we have been monitoring the national and local pandemic very closely. We have been in contact with local and national field experts and doctors. We have also stayed close to the [CDC](#), [WHO](#), [VDOH](#), and [JCC](#) websites, which we encourage. Finally, we have been on a steady email thread with over 50 other church leaders to consult one another for the greater good of God's people and our city. The ongoing developments of the pandemic locally added an additional layer to our preparedness strategy and the precautionary measures to be enacted.

It seems to us that the two most *unhelpful* responses to this pandemic are to panic on the one hand (panic-purchases toilet paper, never leaving the house, etc.), and to minimize (tell people it's "no big deal," change nothing about how you live, and tease those who are afraid). Instead we want to take courage, remembering that having courage doesn't mean we are fearless, but that we will choose to not let fear control our lives and push us away from our neighbor who reflects the image of our God. We want to be motivated by love, not fear or self-protection—love of one another and love of neighbors, especially the most vulnerable.

### **How We Are Reorganizing our Sunday Gatherings For Now**

There is a significant difference between the Church and other entities, such as colleges, businesses, and others who have already taken drastic measures due to the virus: the Church needs to continue meeting in *some form*. It is essential for people's spiritual, emotional, and in the deepest sense bodily health, especially in times of anxiety and fear. Worship is essential for human flourishing and reorienting our identity to the One who loves and liberated us from all things. Together we are empowered by the Spirit to cultivate a non-anxious presence of self-giving love and faithful witness to the One who is Lord and Liberator, our Resurrection and Life, our God and Redeeming King.

With that in mind, we feel it is wise to **reorganize** how we gather for the next two weeks, ***Sundays March 15 and 22***. We will re-assess for the 29th. Please read the following carefully

as I will attempt to spell this out one matter at a time. If you have questions, please email Fred or Jon.

1. **We will conduct one 11am worship gathering at the WCC building to be live-streamed online via our Vimeo site here <https://vimeo.com/event/24566>:** To break it down:
  - Jon and I only will lead the gathering. He will lead music (I may accompany).
  - We will follow our typical Sunday liturgy.
  - I will offer a lesson in a bible-study format which *after this Sunday* will include worksheets for you to access.
  - Vimeo also has an smartphone app you can download.
2. **Since we will not offer any activities for children or students at the gathering, Erin and Garrett will offer two videos of a pre-recorded Big Idea.** To break it down:
  - Erin will create one video for ages 4 to 5th grade.
  - Garrett will create one video for ages 6th-12th grade.
  - They will be accessible by 12pm on Sunday afternoon and can be watched anytime and will be relatively short.
  - After this Sunday, handouts and take home material will be made available to all families if you want to conduct your own family 'small group' time at home.
3. **Concerning the Need for Personal Presence:** ~~if you are not high-risk in terms of age or compromised immune system, and if you are not feeling sick and desire personal presence, we welcome you. Free to join us at the WCC building for the 11am gathering. We understand that some of us need this kind of interaction and we want to facilitate that. Know that it will be very casual and the seating arrangement will be in accordance to the suggestion of the CDC. Likewise will not gather more than 30 people.~~ ***Due to the request of city and county leaders concerning the community outbreak status of our city, we will remain online only. We will offer more ways to connect via ZOOM through the Sunday night bible study and mid-week bible studies, and other options.***
4. **Concerning Those Considered High-risk or Feeling Sick:** If you are considered high-risk in terms of age or compromised immune system or, feel sick in any way, please stay home. It is okay. *We will not abandon you* and will reach out to you. Please let us know how we can serve you. As for Sunday, participate with us online.
5. **Concerning Those Not Considered High-risk But Feeling Uneasy:** If you and your family, due to other reasons, feel it is best to stay home, please do. *We support you.* But please participate with us as a church family. The online option is a compromise for these times and is of a temporary purpose for which I will outline later. When this is over we will need to get back together in person.
6. **Concerning Eucharist:** this week we invite you to creatively come up with your own home options. After this Sunday we will make the prepackaged options available for each family so we can share in the Eucharist together. Even though we may be sharing it virtually, we are sharing in it spiritually in the heavenly realm. Christ is very present with us in a particular way during Eucharist. Let's keep observing, sharing and celebrating.

7. **Concerning Offering:** we encourage you to keep this practice of generosity going forward. We have the online giving options [here](#). In a time when we will be tempted to button down the financial hatch with fears of scarcity, we have a legitimate opportunity as God's people to do what the Church has often done: bear witness to an alternative way of seeing the world under God's reign and extend generosity and hospitality. There will be many among the WCC family impacted in different ways, some more dire than others. If we are to continue sharing this burden it will literally take all of us. Likewise, there will be many neighbors in desperate need. Please, press into weekly giving, greater generosity, and trust the Lord.

Because:

- Parents/guardians who make hourly wages will miss paychecks due to sickness or needing to stay home and keep children. Also, members of WCC and our neighbors who make hourly wages will miss work due to closures and be in danger of not making rent payments or essential bills.
- We are taught, among many things, that "Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord and He shall reward the lender." (Proverbs 19:17). Let's trust Him.
- Our God's economy is ***never in trouble***. Now is the time to demonstrate this to ***one another*** and a ***desperate watching world***. I believe in Him and His provision. I believe in each one of us.

This approach and new digital reality is a temporary compromise rather than an ongoing convenience. We need each other and will return to our typical way of gathering as wisdom reveals. Until then, we will be 'with' each other in creative ways and create other ways to be together.

### **Other Information to Come and How We Will Communicate**

During a video to be released later tonight we will outline these next steps going forward and how we want to encourage the WCC family to live faithfully during this time to God's glory, our collective good, and the collective good of all our neighbors. This email is meant to concern our large group Sunday worship gatherings only, beginning this Sunday and through March. ***Updates will continue via Realm, then Prayer-line, then website, then Social Media.***

### **Words of Encouragement and a Prayer**

Finally, I want to say thank you for those among us on social media presenting a non-anxious presence in these anxious times. We can prepare out of love not panic. Preparation is not panic unless they are accompanied by aggression and anxiety. We should be preparing — urgently in some cases — but not panicking.

As I have said elsewhere, let's settle onto science-based facts and lean into faith so we aren't controlled by the fear and can avoid going FOFO (full-on freak-out). Again, let's remember that courage doesn't mean we are fearless, but that we will choose to not let fear control our lives and push us away from our neighbor who reflects the image of our God.

- As people of faith let us pray for the vulnerable among us. Let us less-vulnerable people be willing to serve and be present with them and for their families.
- As people of faith let us pray for our city's first responders and medical professionals. Let us less-vulnerable people, be willing to serve and be present with them and their families.

- As people of faith let's use our God-given minds and intellect and consider only credible, reputable sources like local municipality webpages, CDC, WHO, etc, rather than news media. I appreciate the role news media plays in keeping us informed, but a pandemic requires we listen to experts actively working in the field, not just media experts.

Hold on to a non-anxious presence. Hold on to hospitality. Hold on to generosity. King Jesus is hold on to us. He isn't anxious. He isn't inhospitable toward us, even as we may be anxious. And he isn't going to cease being generous. Hold on to Him and His Spirit will guide you.

If you want a prayer to pray we suggest the one we shared via our Facebook page.

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their healthy or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips remember those that have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

As fear groups our country, let us choose love. During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen. (author unknown)

On Behalf of the WCC Leadership,

Fred

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**A Word from our own Dr. Dawn Muench, a Pediatrician, an Infectious Disease physician, a former Military Physician**

Hi Fred,

In light of our conversations the last few days I just wanted to send along these brief thoughts that you can share with anyone you'd like to. As a Pediatrician, an Infectious Disease physician, a former military physician and someone who has traveled and been close to outbreaks at different times in my career, I just wanted to say thanks for the way WCC is keeping us informed and reminding us of where to look for our sources of truth. I think it is so important that we make sure the resources we are getting our information from are written and endorsed by experts in the field- whether that's medical providers, researchers, epidemiologists or other people with training and experience to provide guidance and information.

Social media and access to news coverage is so vital in times like this, but they can also spread misinformation and cause unnecessary increases in fear and anxiety which can lead to us all making less wise decisions. The CDC and WHO are the most experienced groups to collate and disseminate information and even with "shortcomings" in the US response and preparedness (and there will ALWAYS be shortcomings in these types of situations,) they remain accurate places to get information. Each person and family will have unique situations to address and so should keep up with local recommendations and situations. I would encourage people who read things that incite them to have increased fear or that seem to be saying novel things, to make sure they investigate other places to ensure they are accurate and qualified sources of information.

As things change daily, it is so important that we stay calm and connected to each other and to God. Things like breath prayers for anxiety, podcasts and videos that help us remain calm and continue to listen to God, and conversations with friends and family will be key for mental and spiritual health going forward. Even if we are isolated at home, we can get outdoors in our yards or on our sidewalks and breathe fresh air, get some exercise, remember how beautiful our world is- again all of this leads to improved mental health, sleep, and immune system health.

We can choose to use social media for "good" and facetime/video chat each other and stay connected in those ways even if we aren't able to leave our houses. We can make sure those at more risk for isolation and loneliness have a network of people checking in on them. We can take advantage of "enforced down time" for many of us, to catch up on time with family, to rest, to eat well- again all things that keep our immune systems healthy. Our physical, mental, spiritual and relational health are intricately intertwined and it is so important to remember this.

Please feel free to give my contact info to anyone who might want it—I am more than happy to talk to people if that feels helpful.

Peace and Light,

Dawn