

Dear Covenant Grace,

This is an unprecedented time in the life of our country and our church. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, our Government has declared a state of national disaster and amongst other restrictions, banned 'all gatherings greater than 100 people'. We believe that they have shown good leadership and are making the best decisions that can be made given the circumstances.

These actions will radically affect how we interact as citizens and how we meet and worship as a church. After much prayer and consultation we have decided to **suspend all our formal church meetings for the next two weeks**. (We will review the situation again on Tuesday the 31 March.) The data is very clear about how important quick and complete 'social distancing' is to saving lives. In this unusual time it's important to realize that 'physical distancing' doesn't have to mean we lose a sense of community.

A) These have been our guiding principles in response to the Coronavirus:

1. Christian wisdom: We are not responding out of fear but in faith. We are trusting God for all of our lives and asking that he would use this for His glory and our good. We are seeking to give due recognition to both God's sovereignty over this situation and Man's responsibility in this situation.

Here is a helpful quote from Martin Luther, giving pastoral advice during the Black Plague in the 16th century - *"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy..."* (Luther's, Works v. 43, p. 132.)

2. Christian Love: We feel that making smaller meetings of less than 100 people is technically obeying the letter of the law but not the heart of it. As a leadership team we are committed to playing our part in this global crises, and the stats show that decisive action is the best way to protect and minimize the damage. So we are asking you to love your neighbour by looking after your health and theirs. Avoid all unnecessary contact with people and if you show any flu-like symptoms, please self-isolate immediately. Here's another helpful quote from a recent article - *"In an age of 'look at me' self assertion there is something quite stunning in that one of the most significant services the church can do is not gather, allow for social distancing. The church's absence, its literal emptying, can function as a symbol of its trust in God's ability to meet us regardless of the location. The church remains the church whether gathered or scattered. It might also indirectly remind us of the gift of gathering that we too often take for granted."*

B) These are our suggested rhythms for CG 'scattered' over the next two weeks:

1. Sunday Services: There will be NO public church services for the next two Sundays, 22nd and 29th March. We will however continue to serve you by pre-recording our sermons and make them available to you online, in both video and audio. So we are inviting you to have a '**Home Service**' using the provided CG sermon and kids ministry outline. Due to copyright restrictions we cannot record worship songs but we will provide you with links to recommended songs.

This is a tough decision because church is you and I gathered together for worship, Word and fellowship. These measures strike at the very core of what church is. But we also believe that as we 'scatter' it is a unique opportunity to focus our faith and renew our personal and family devotions.

2. Community Groups:

This week is our last planned Community Group meeting and then we are on a holiday break. We will leave the decision to meet this Wednesday up to each group leader's discretion, but would ask that thereafter all groups are on hold until further notice. If you do decide to have smaller get togethers for prayer and Bible study please be sure to observe all the necessary health protocols.

We would ask everyone to make an extra effort to reach out in creative ways, using technology to stay connected. (WhatsApp groups, FaceTime, Skype, and Google hang outs can be novel platforms for prayer, sharing scripture, and words of encouragement.)

3. Pastoral Care: We realize that for many, particularly those not in a Community Group, this can be a lonely time. So we would encourage all of you to BE the church by reaching out to one another. We urge you to keep asking God how you can love and care for the church and the community around you. Be expectant that despite the crisis, God may open up all sorts of opportunities for gospel care and witness. It is possible to 'physically isolate' for a season without feeling alone, but if you are feeling disconnected or neglected, we want to be here for you, so please let us know by sending us a message.

We will be posting regular updates to our WhatsApp groups and Facebook page, so please be sure to follow us there. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. (info@cgchurch.co.za)

Jude 1:24-25 *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*

Blessings,
Greg & CG team