

Nov 19, 2020

Dear Flock,

I am writing to you on behalf of the church elders and with a burdened heart. The truth, straight-up, is that we've all witnessed a new wave of COVID-19 sweep into West Michigan to a degree that responsible leadership can no longer ignore. There has been a sudden rise in infection rates with a significant up turn in hospitalizations. This latest spike has hit our congregation much closer to home than previously experienced; attacking friends and neighbors with increasing frequency and force. Thankfully, we are aware of only one COVID case in our congregation stretching back to last April. Sadly, we also had two deaths about that same time, touching family members but again, nothing within our local congregation. We have been spared and gratefully so. However, in our current situation we've seen still more families lose loved ones to this disease and multiple households having to quarantine due to COVID exposure. Additionally, we received requests for help from Lansing and our local medical community, who have come to a crisis point, reaching their hospital bed capacity and overwhelming available staff. All this has prompted the elders to ask how should we respond as citizens/Christians; and to review our exposure to avoidable risks. Their considered and prayerful decision, is that we need to buckle down and do whatever we can to keep people safe and prevent the spread of this virus.

Pursuant to this goal and beginning immediately all Sunday and Mid-week services will be closed for the next three weeks (Nov 22—Dec 13). ***We are looking at this as a short term issue with reopening, if at all possible within three weeks.*** I want to emphasize that this decision was self-imposed not government mandated. We have purposely given preference to the vulnerable and those first responders (including several within our church family) treating the sick and dying. As much as we regret these cancelations, we believe this is the Christian thing to do, as ...”with humility of mind, {we}

regard others as more important than ourselves; and not merely looking out for our own personal interest, but also for the interests of others.” (Phil 2:3-4) We are not capitulating to Caesar or “forsaking our assembling together.” Live streaming will be provided; ministry will go on and unless the situation seriously worsens, we will be together again in three weeks. Beloved, this will only be a problem if we make it one. Calling on the best of ourselves we can chose to be supportive and cooperate even with a difficult and unwelcome decision. Times being what they are, tough choices will need to be made with alarming regularity. We must not allow them to grind us down or divide us. The first test of godly character is what we do when things don’t go our way. COVID’S worst wave may be yet to come. So the question always, is not what is desired or preferred but what’s right? Together we will get through this and make a difference for Christ and His Kingdom. And why not? Though in challenging times, we still have much to be thankful about.

In the Grip of His Grace,  
Pastor Jim