

March 17, 2020

Dear Church Family,

When I was a student at Union University I was so impressed by a certain verse that I wrote it down on an index card and taped it to the bookshelf above the desk in my dorm room. The verse was Isaiah 41:10. It says, *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*

This verse still speaks to me even in the midst of the pandemic that we are facing the spring of 2020. This text reminds us of the Lord's peace, His presence, His sovereignty, the power of God, His assistance, divine support as well as His righteousness. There is a lot packed in to that one little verse! I encourage you to lean on His promises during this season that we are in right now. Thankfully, so far, we have no cases of the virus in the communities surrounding Columbus or in Colorado County. If this changes, remember His promise.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a revised statement on Sunday (3/15/2020) after we met for worship saying, *"Therefore, CDC, in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings, recommends that for the next 8 weeks, organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States."* Then, yesterday afternoon (3/16/2020) the President and the Task Force changed this recommendation to advise groups of 10 people or more no longer gather together publicly.

In response to these new advisories, and out of consideration for the health and well being of others, we are going to cancel all gatherings of church members and visitors until May 10, 2020. This time frame could, however, be lifted earlier if conditions improve with the control of the virus earlier than anticipated. This will also include the Clothes Closet. The volunteer staff will also be closing it until things are all clear. The church staff, of course, will still be available at the office if you need something, please don't hesitate to call us.

This also includes the children's ministry and the student ministry. They will stay in step with the Columbus ISD. As long as the public school is not meeting, then there will be no meetings at the church for the children or the youth. This covers the nursery, as well.

Since medical researchers have explained the ways that the virus can be transmitted beyond direct human contact (i.e. touching surfaces such as door knobs, chairs and tables even days later, breathing virus-laced particles in the air up to 3 hours later, etc.), we are going to extra measures to keep the building as clean and sanitized as possible for when we do have folks meeting in the building. Therefore, for the next eight-week period, we would like to encourage you to avoid any extracurricular activities such as dropping in to play basketball, gathering to play volleyball, hosting showers, etc. These are things that are normally fine, but during this one stretch, we are asking for your understanding and cooperation so that we can be assured that an area on the church campus is ready for public use. If you would like to request a group of 10 or less meet at the church for a ministry meeting, please just inform the staff of who will be gathering and where the small group will assemble.

Along with these adjustments, we continue to request that individuals coming by the church office practice considerate and healthy hygiene such as not coming to the church campus if one has a fever or a cough, washing hands with soap and water before and after coming, avoiding shaking hands or hugging, etc.

The President in his press conference yesterday predicted that this crisis could last as long as July or August, so we will have to be patient and see how long we are in this mode.

Lastly, how can we continue to function as the body of Christ over the next two months without meeting together like usual? We have been thinking about this and have a few ideas that we would like to share with you at this time. As we learn more, we may discover additional ways of serving you and helping you and your family continue to grow in your walk with Christ. Below are a few of the things we are already working on to assist you.

### **Communication**

We do not want to disconnect from each other for eight weeks. Please keep us in the loop of any prayer needs and/or ways that we might serve you. Also, someone from the church may give you a call just to make sure things are going well. Of course, call, email or text one another at any point during this time! That would be awesome! You mean a lot to us, and we value you more than just your attendance at "meetings".

### **Technology**

We will be posting video clips of worship and sermons on our church website and Facebook that you may watch on Sunday mornings with your family. We will also be sending periodic email updates for information and prayer. There will be more devotions and bible studies posted on the church website to help you continue to grow in your faith on the tab entitled, *Boost from the Word*.

### **Resources**

LifeWay has already begun to produce helpful resources to bless church members in line with various Sunday School series. Trudi and her team will be contacting AWANA families to assist parents in facilitating learning and Scripture memory at home. We will try to make you aware of resources that can help you with small group gatherings in homes, one-to-one peer mentoring, family devotions or personal bible study lessons.

The Lord will help us during this difficult time as a nation. The main direction we encourage you to look over the next couple of months is to the Lord Himself. He promised that He would never leave you nor forsake you. Let this time of decreased nation-wide activity be a season to seek Christ and His kingdom. If we will put Him first during this period where all is scaled down, then we can emerge from this stronger and renewed in the Lord. Since the Lord has allowed this to take place on our watch, we can rest assured that He has a purpose in how He would have us to respond to this unique national emergency.

I encourage you and all Americans to respond to this time as an opportunity to turn to the Lord in repentance and dependence. What would happen in this country, if rather than wasting this time or being frustrated with this hour, we spent it by putting Christ first? It could be a catalyst for a nationwide awakening and a kingdom-wide revival.

Prayerfully,  
Pastor Victor