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Hello New South Friends,

What a week!

In lieu of the normal Weekly Word, below you'll find my letter to the Wilmore congregation about our plans for the next week or so, and then after that, I'll mention a couple more things:

March 13, 2020

Dear WFMC Family,

This has been an interesting week, hasn't it?

I'll admit that my personal response to the events has certainly covered the gamut. ***In the final analysis, however, we are choosing to cancel all church gatherings and events – beginning tomorrow (Saturday, March 14) and running through next Saturday evening (March 20.)***

We will continue monitoring the situation and likely make a decision late next week about future events and gatherings. The church office will be open according to its normal schedule.

Why? Well, after much consultation with other local churches, institutions (and with some of our own medical professionals - doctors and nurses – some even this morning who are working first-hand with this virus) here is my understanding:

- Covid-19 is roughly two times more contagious than the common flu.
- It lasts far longer in the air and on surfaces.
- Far more people will actually “catch” it (than the common flu) due to its newness - there is no innate immunity in our bodies to it yet.
- Some won't even know they have it, but those are the ones most likely to spread it to the populations of persons for whom it is far more dangerous.
- Although percentages cannot yet be known due to testing irregularities, the death rate of Covid-19 is markedly higher than that of the common flu for those over 60, and especially for men over 80.

Not having worship or other church gatherings won't stop the virus' spread – it's going to spread and many will contract it. But we want to do all we can to slow its spread (flatten the curve, if you will) so medical professionals can most adequately care for those in most need. We want to cooperate with the efforts of our society and demonstrate that Christ-followers are very willing to make sacrifices for our neighbors' well-being.

Please believe me - this was not an easy decision to reach, and I know that some will disagree. Just the same, with all things considered, we believe that it is the most responsible decision in the long term, and we make it not in fear, but for the sake of compassion for those most vulnerable.

As I have already written, these are interesting times. In these days when the pace of life has been slowed for (some of) us, why not take the time and re-connect with family? Use the gift we've been given to encourage and engage. Let the Lord speak through our upturned schedules. Lead an informal time of worship for your family or with a couple friends on Sunday.

Through it all, may the Lord reveal himself in the midst of our dark and broken world...and may He do it through His body, the Church, acting in love.

We'll all miss seeing each other on Sunday, but we'll all see each other again soon.

Pastor Daryl

Here in KY, public schools are out for 2-3 weeks, both Asbury institutions (and many other schools) are closing for 2-3 weeks, and on and on...and on!. Our governor has asked (not mandated) us to suspend worship services/large gatherings for the reasons mentioned above.

Things may be different where you are - maybe better...maybe worse. Please respond to your circumstance according to your and your local leaders' best wisdom. Here is our Bishops' latest letter that seeks to give a little more guidance.

Dear FMC Family,

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV).

We are living in a moment when things are unfolding at dizzying speed. Every hour another U.S. governor declares restrictions on gatherings; the map of COVID-19's global impact keeps expanding.

Whatever you decided yesterday about continuing to meet together this Sunday may have to be revised, as governments seek to contain the spread by prohibiting large gatherings. We repeat what we communicated yesterday - do abide by your local and state government's guidelines.

We believe this can be a moment for the church to shine. Seize the opportunity to do something new - maybe something old! Worship formats are flexible. How about giving some guidance for families to circle up and create their own interactive, participatory time of singing, prayer, reading the Scripture and offering one another insights from the Word? Maybe your church members who live close to each other could be encouraged to gather in the community room of an apartment complex or someone's living room for this kind of informal and highly personal worship time.

If you have the capacity to live-stream a service from your church building (even with only the pastor, the worship team and tech person onsite), maybe you could have small "watch parties" all over your community. Some of your people might even invite friends and neighbors who are feeling stressed and fearful to join in for a word of hope and comfort from God.

If you do choose some sort of gathering, please be particularly aware of all the advice we're being given about disinfecting hard surfaces, washing hands frequently, avoiding unnecessary touching of one another (we really can get used to elbow-bumping with a knowing smile), maintaining some distance between each other, and above all, discouraging anyone with cold symptoms or fever from coming. Even if a household member is elderly or particularly at risk, family members should be encouraged not to come and risk exposure. We don't exercise caution out of fear, but out of regard for those most vulnerable to serious complications from the virus.

And of course, our life together is not meant to be a Sunday-only thing. We have lots of ways to stay in touch seven days a week - calling, texting, emailing, sharing on social media. Let's use whatever resources we have to speak into each other's lives words of faith, hope and love. Let's pray for one another and for our leaders, and then let each other know. Let's share Scripture verses that God has impressed on our hearts. In the face of the anxiety all around us, let's be a non-anxious presence because of the peace Jesus gives.

We are grateful for the privilege of leading the church in times like this. We are praying for you.

With hope,
Linda Adams, Keith Cowart, Matt Whitehead
The Board of Bishops, FMCUSA

Also...we are also cancelling the in-person BOA/MEG/MAC meetings and interviews scheduled for next weekend. We will either reschedule or go with Zoom video meetings. We'll decide about that in the coming days. You who are on the these bodies and you who were to be interviewed, please simply hit reply so that I know you've read of this cancellation.

These are extraordinary days - apocalyptic even.

May our world get the message that only God really controls things here.
May He have mercy on us, especially our elderly, all around the world.
May our neighbors see the winsomeness of Jesus in us as we love and serve in peace.

Contact me if you need me, and I'll do my best!

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"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." ~ Helen Keller