

Good Friday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 38th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending April 3, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

Announcements

1) Annual Conference, 2020: As per the direction of our Bishops, we will not be meeting personally for Annual Conferences this year. After discussion with our Board of Administration, we will instead work with all delegates to conducting normal business electronically, including the Nominating Team report and MEG report. We will have a gathering, to include the ordination service, as soon as we are able to meet together. Just this week, the Board of Bishops has given conference BOA's all authority to conduct conference business in these extraordinary times.

2) Please Keep the Family of Dick Keep (Elder, retired) in your prayers as several have the COVID-19 virus and are quite sick. If people in your church or family are sick with COVID, send me their names for our prayers.

3) The History and Polity Class scheduled for April in Gallatin has postponed until conditions improve and persons are once again permitted to cross the state border.

4) With Regard to Meeting Together: I have had several pastors and leaders ask me whether or not they should be meeting for worship in these days. Based on what I've seen and heard, my short answer would be, "no." My longer answer would be, "in this instance, we should obey the laws and recommendations of those who govern us." Here's my rationale:

I know that some resist NOT meeting based on their thinking that, either, 1) the government is out to crush the church, or, 2) the virus isn't really that bad, or 3) God will protect those who gather for worship from the infection...or some combination of these three things. Frankly, in this case (not in every case but in this case,) I personally reject all these arguments.

First, while at times governments have indeed been out to eradicate the church, I think in this instance, the government is trying to, in fact, protect people. There may well be a time for the church to resist the law, but this is not one of those times. Second, in the end, the virus may not truly be that bad, but I don't think anyone really knows that for sure at present. Third, I think you can find several cases in the news where churches or church groups have, in an act of resistance, met and worshipped, and then a big percentage of those gathered were infected and then passed that on to others.

Again, Luther's words to Hess regarding life during the plague apply to us: *"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. This is a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."*

Just Wednesday, I learned that there are several FM pastors suffering from the virus, and one has died of the virus (Ronnie Hampton, Gulf Coast Conference.) So, 1) let's obey the guidance of our governments – this is not a theological issue. 2) If the virus proves not to be so very terrible, then we'll praise the Lord in a few weeks or so. 3) Let's not tempt God. Let's not be the church that appears on the news where the infection has passed around and caused the death of some of our, or someone else's, beloved saints. Thanks!

Church of the Week: Church 180 in Rock Hill, SC with pastor Reed Wilbanks.

Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern)

April 9:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
April 27:	ABS (Area Bishop and Superintendents) - Zoom
May 14:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
May 29-30:	New South Annual Conference - Zoom
June 8:	ABS – Indianapolis (Zoom?)
June 15-20:	NSC Teen Camp
June 11-14:	NSC Family Camp
June 22-26:	NSC Kids' Camp
August 9-11:	ABS – Baltimore
August 25-28:	Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis
September 23-25:	New Room Conference, Nashville, TN

And now...

-----**The Important**-----

Resources, Articles and Attachments

1) Some Updates about how our churches are ministering in these strange days:

From Pastor / Planter Joe Ritter (Waynesville, NC): "Since churches are unlikely to meet on Palm Sunday, I am recording daily podcasts this week explaining the meaning of the different images and teachings in Jesus' triumphal entry. The podcasts are posted to the [Waynesville Free Methodist Church Facebook page](#). This is one way we are trying to keep our name out there and provide thought-provoking content while churches are closed for one of the peak seasons of the year.

Sunday, I recorded a podcast on Zaccheus. Yesterday was on the donkey, and I just posted a podcast on Hosanna. The rest of the week I will cover the palm branches and coats, the barren fig tree, cleansing the temple, a brief summary of the parables Jesus taught from the temple, and then Palm Sunday will be a podcast on Luke 19:41-44. I will endeavor to do the same next week leading up to Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection."

Roger and Debby Ryan (Fountain Square Ministries, KY) are trying to find a way to keep feeding the homeless who need to be fed and witnessing for Christ to them even as groups of over ten are not permitted to meet together. Pray that this ministry might continue in a safe and good way.

From Pastors Chris and Buffy Cole (Westmoreland, TN): "Chris and I continue ministering via FB live on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. I'm currently working from home as mandated by my agency. At first, I was able to travel down to Westmoreland to check in on people but with Sumner county as one of the counties with the highest COVID cases and Gov. Beshear adamant about limited crossing state lines, our ministry is limited to phone calls and video chats. Please continue holding us in prayer..."

*I'd welcome a paragraph from you reporting the sorts of things your church is doing. We'd all love to hear good ideas for ministry in these days.

2) A Word on Change: You know very well that we are in the midst of a major, global event – we've all figured that out by now. What we may not all want to admit is that this event is going to provoke significant change in the way we, and those who come after us, see our world and understand our place in it. The world, as it is today with social distancing and empty store shelves and closed stores, is not the new normal; it is just a time of transition. After this transitional period, however, there will be a new normal; one that we can't see just yet, but one that we need to be thinking about and preparing for, as best we can.

We have all been forced to change in some way or another in the past few weeks. Some of that change may be hard, but some can be very worthwhile...and that which is truly worthwhile will shape our tomorrow and make the new normal. As long as we can see this and embrace it, we can help make the new normal a truly better place than the normal we left. This is the most significant opportunity for assessment and positive change in most of our lifetimes.

Let's be intentional, then, to use this time, personally, spiritually, professionally and relationally, to assess who we are, where we are, what we're doing, and how we're investing our resources, as a way of embracing the opportunity that's been forced upon us. This is already big. Let's be sure to make it good!

3) April World Mission Praise and Prayer Guide - Attached: The New South World Mission Liaison, Lois Huff, writes, "When I was a little girl, I heard people sing, "Everybody talkin' 'bout heaven ain't goin' there," and in my childish mind, I thought, "Why would anyone sing that they weren't going to heaven?" not realizing that it meant that everyone who was talking about going to heaven is not going to be there. Today, Christians around the world are saying that God is in control and that they are trusting Him. May it not just be 'talk.' May all of us have a deep, heart-felt conviction that God really is in control, which will lead us to deep, heart-felt faith as we pray for the world. God bless you!

4) John Wesley on Social Distancing: *"Avoid all the people you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, as long as you ever can."* (This is a joke, of course.)

Job Openings

At this point, we have a pastor or interim pastor in every NSC church, although those interim situations are, well, interim. We will have at least two pastoral openings this summer. Contact me for details.

Remember too that [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at FMC Human Resources.

April Birthdays (*that we know of)

Neil Anderson – Professor, Asbury University, Wilmore (KY), April 19

Joe Ritter – Pastor/Planter, Waynesville (NC), April 22

*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at newsouthconference@gmail.com

This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: This Sunday I continue a series on the letters to the churches of Revelation with the letter to Laodicea, and how spiritual blindness, which affected the Laodicean church, was what also plagued the Jews on Palm Sunday as they failed to recognize Jesus as their promised Messiah.

Quote: *"We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations."* - Chuck Swindoll

Joke: Johnny was on the way to church when he stopped by the corner store. He was going to use his Sunday school money to buy candy when the proprietor, who knew the family well, put up his hand.
"Son, you should give that money to the church."
Johnny replied, "I have a better idea, I'll buy the candy, and then YOU can give it to the church.!"

Blessings on your weekend and on your day of worship.