

Good Friday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 39<sup>th</sup> edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending April 10, 2020. Fair warning – this is a little long today, but I hope informative and helpful.

## -----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 much discussion with our Board of Administration, we are working to assemble our delegate list and will conduct business electronically. We will have a gathering, to include an ordination service, as soon as we are able to meet together personally.

**2) Holy Communion** – How do we serve it online? Attached you'll find some directions and help from our Bishops.

**3) Wilmore FMC is Producing a Series** of video messages, "Covid Comments" featuring scholars / speakers / missionaries offering their thoughts about and through this pandemic. They are being released each Wednesday. The first was Dr. Jerry Coleman. This past Wednesday's Covid Comments were made by Tony Headley. [Check them out here.](#)

#### **4) Some Prayer Requests:**

Please keep my friend, Will Hoyle, in your prayers. Will is a prison chaplain in North Carolina investigating ordination with the FMC. He wrote today:

"I am exhausted right now. Our prison has the highest increase in Covid 19 of any in the country. [\(Click here for the news story.\)](#)

We spent hours yesterday getting Jewish inmates ready for the first night of Passover and we do it all twice because, outside Israel, 2 Seders are required to meet Jewish law. Then we prep for Muslim Ramadan and trying to feed 40 fasting inmates locked down. Multiply this all times 5 prisons on the same piece of land with 5000 inmates and 1600 staff. Besides that, staff are getting sick. Inmates continue to get sick and are locked in. They get 5 minute phone calls to family instead of the usual 15 minutes. They haven't been outdoors to recreate for two weeks. As I make rounds they are angrier and angrier. I'm a big dude and one three times my size threatened me the other day because I had a surgical mask and he didn't. It got dicey.

And...my wife is working from home with kids who are stir crazy. Please keep us in your prayers."

**5) A Reminder from the Free Methodist Foundation:** Mr. Cary Holman represents Free Methodist Financial Services to our conference and he writes, "I wanted to let you know that I continue to be available to help folks connect with FMF Financial Services. This link might be a quick and easy way to do that, <https://fmffinancial.org/cary/>. Don't hesitate to contact Cary with questions about the services that the FMFS offers. Check out their website: <https://fmfoundation.org/>

**6) Covid-19 and Church Finances:** If your church is having trouble meeting financial obligations during these days, please contact our book-keeper, Patti McPeake, at [Finances.NSC@gmail.com](mailto:Finances.NSC@gmail.com). We're ready to help ease financial burdens on churches and have the support of the denomination to do so.

**Church of the Week:** Smyrna FMC with Pastor Ryan Bigham.

## Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern)

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 people and churches are ministering in these strange days:

**From Lisa Tanico (Greensboro, NC):** *"I've been helping in worship lately at Trinity Evangelical Covenant, and the pastor and I solicited the congregation to send videos of their kids singing "Hosanna, Loud Hosannas," since there won't be a palm processional. We got three, so I combined them into one big video and it turned out pretty cute.*

*For Good Friday, we're doing a Stations of the Cross. One of my friends is playing Jesus, and myself and his wife are the other characters in the passion story. But the cool thing is that it's done with no speaking — off camera, the scripture is read, and through minimal gesture we relate the events. We're also dressed in modern-day clothing, just dark jeans and shirts.*

*I choreographed a version of this several years ago and it's pretty powerful. We've always done it live, but of course this year we can't, so my husband is filming it and we'll insert it into the livestream service on Good Friday.*

*For Maundy Thursday I'm going to do a meditation here at home, maybe outside at our fish pond, about servanthood... no communion service or love feast, but the foot washing scripture is powerful.*

*We've yet to figure out Easter Sunday...this Easter season is strange and heartbreaking, as is standing in an empty sanctuary on Sunday morning. BUT — I know God is at work, and at the very least, restoring creativity and energy into places that need it."*

**Along with our Normal Sunday Worship Services, Wilmore FMC** *is producing a series of video messages, the Wednesday Word, that features scholars / speakers / missionaries talking about what the Lord is saying to them about and through this pandemic. They are being released each Wednesday. The first was Dr. Jerry Coleman. This past Wednesday's Word was Dr. Tony Headley. [Click here to watch at the Wilmore FMC YouTube Channel.](#)*

\*Please send me a paragraph on the sorts of things you are / your church is doing. We'd all love to hear good ideas for ministry in these days.

**2) Here Are Some Very Good Resources** for pastoral ministry in our day from Southern Baptist Seminary. [Click here.](#)

**3) Some Other Resources for Worship This Holy Weekend:**

WFMC's Good Friday worship service is available now, and the Easter Worship service will be available there beginning early Easter Sunday morning. [Click here to watch.](#)

Bishop Keith Cowart brings a brief holy week greeting and message. [Click here to view and listen.](#)

Apparently opera singer Andrea Bocelli will livestream (free) an Easter Sunday Concert from the Duomo cathedral in Milan, Italy. [You can click here for that link and information.](#)

Also, Sight and Sound Theatre is making available (for free) the stage production, "JESUS" in celebration of Easter. This weekend only. [Click here for details.](#)

**4) Do We Sacrifice the Economy to Save Human Lives or Do We Sacrifice Human Lives to Save the Economy?** (by Andrew Walker, Associate Professor of Ethics, Southern Baptist Seminary)

*Tuesday, Washington Post reporter Sarah Pulliam Bailey published a very interesting piece on how policymakers, ethicists, and religious leaders are thinking through the apparent dilemma of practicing extreme measures to preserve life versus the cost that such practices will mean for the economy.*

*The dilemma as presented can be stated in this way: Is it more important to preserve life or preserve economic vibrancy? Do we sacrifice the economy to save human lives or do we sacrifice human lives to save the economy?*

*This is an important topic as it is at the front of the public mind, and it hits squarely upon the tension between utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics: Is the best action that which obtains the greatest outcome for the largest number of people, or does a commitment to human dignity mean that we cannot treat humans as a means to an economic end? I'll offer a couple preliminary thoughts on this question before I get to delivering my own answers.*

*First, as a matter of presupposition, a dilemma posed like this is the result of living in a world marked by the principle of scarcity. Scarcity is simply the idea that conditions do not exist that guarantee ideal outcomes for all parties: There is not enough money for every person to have a Mercedes. At present, there are not enough hospital beds for every human being who might need one (and manufacturing seven billion beds in a short time is more or less impossible). Eliminating the scarcity principle is a utopian ideal. In a world of limited resources, there will be a shortage of supplies necessary to address all problems sufficiently and perfectly.*

*Pragmatically, we might also call the scarcity principle one of imperfectability. But scarcity is also a theological principle. The reason we humans lack essentials or are in need of anything for our survival is because we live in a world governed by Genesis 3 and Romans 8. A fallen world ensures that even in a context of profound economic growth, somebody, somewhere will lack what they need not only for their basic flourishing but survival as well.*

*Second, we need to raise the issue of apparent dilemmas versus real dilemmas. Since the problem we're facing—preserving economic growth versus preserving human life—assumes a zero-sum answer, we need to question whether that's the correct way to understand the situation. I would argue, upon deeper examination, it is not actually a dilemma like we think it is, because a dilemma presupposes an either/or solution in absolute*

*form. It presupposes there are no exceptions, allowances, moderating positions, or prudential judgments at stake. Either one is wholly committed to one outcome to the neglect of the other.*

*The situation we're in as a culture does not require this zero-sum analysis. While it is wrong to pit life versus the economy, speaking as a Christian, human dignity means we are committed to not intending direct harm to an image-bearer of God. What results are prudential decisions and actions to keep people healthy and prudential decisions and actions to keep the economy going. It is most assuredly not a choice between absolute death and absolute poverty. Such a dilemma would only be real if there were no alternative resorts.*

*But last resorts have not been exhausted. For example (and I'm not necessarily recommending this as much as I am exploring it as a hypothetical), what if the government called for all elderly and immune-compromised persons to stay at home while developing a volunteer system that allowed healthier individuals to "adopt" a compromised person during the duration of the quarantine? The person would be responsible for daily phone calls to check on their neighbor's welfare, get them groceries and necessary items, and in return, the government could issue a tax-credit at the end of the year as a way to socially signal its approval of human dignity and as a way to stimulate the economy? This is just one example of how to creatively think about the moral intentions behind policy.*

*That gets me to how I would address the question of whether one side is more or less correct in choosing to preserve life or choosing economic health: One does not have to choose between either. The way the debate is popularly framed is a false dilemma. The framing depicts the government as intending one harm or one benefit over the other. We can eliminate this framing by appealing to the Law of Double Effect, a theory with origins in the Christian theologian, Thomas Aquinas.*

*In ethics, Double Effect theory states that a morally good action is justified in pursuing even if an unintended, but possibly foreseen negative consequence results. In the case of a terminally ill patient, a doctor has performed a morally justified action in reducing a patient's pain, even if, as a result, the patient dies. The doctor was intending to reduce pain, not hasten death.*

*What does this mean regarding COVID-19? It means that unless government action is intending the destruction of human lives or the economy, action that may result in unintended harms is justified. In this instance, policy decisions that the government makes are not reducible down to consequences, but intention. The government, in choosing to protect its citizens, may, as a result, harm the economy. Perhaps, though, it could find a prudentially creative means to both preserve life and stimulate the economy. Alternatively, in choosing to stimulate the economy, it by no means entails the government wantonly disregarding care and concern for human life. It is not inviting death or willing death. It understands that despite the exercise of prudential wisdom in calling for people to quarantine or social distance, it is impossible to eliminate all negative consequences in a moral event.*

*These are really challenging times, and we need to exercise caution in judging the motives of our policymakers. For who among them actually believes themselves willing the harm of those they are called to govern?*

## **5) What Is Your Theology of Causation?** (Eurasia/Central Asia Easter Newsletter April 2020)

*Did God cause this pandemic to get our attention?*

*Does God use a megaphone so that we notice him?*

*Does God send suffering, pain and disaster upon people specifically and in general?*

*The way we answer these questions reveals much about how we know and understand who God is!*

*Can we blame God for the present pandemic?*

*Why is God so capricious and unfair by sparing some and allowing death to swallow others?*

*Clearly, if you take a hint from the Old Testament, the lesson there is that decisions have consequences. The prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah clearly had warnings of judgment to come. Yet, in every instance that I know of, there were words of hope if there was repentance and a change of heart. All this was part of the "covenant" or a "contract" that Israel had with God. Israel knew what was expected by God and was warned by prophets concerning their behavior.*

*Does God still have transactional relationships today?*

*Does God give us a direct revelation and explanation of pandemics of personal tragedies or even global ones like the Hebrews of old experienced?*

*If such revelation has come to you personally then you know why you are experiencing a crisis or suffering today. For most of us such revelation alludes us.*

*It's interesting that Jesus didn't answer the question of causation. He said, "He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Mt 5:45). His (Jesus) disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (Jn9:2-3) and also see Luke 13:1-5.*

*The "why" seems to be important to us but we will never find a definitive answer. God can use a megaphone; anything is possible with God. But most of the time God uses the still small voice of the Holy Spirit to speak to us. God is LOVE and uses his love by the Holy Spirit to draw us to himself.*

## **6) John Wesley and Primitive Physic (Eurasia/Central Asia Easter Newsletter April 2020)**

Healthcare has been in the DNA of the Methodist movement from its beginning. The founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, drew their inspiration for health care out of their concern for the plight of the poor. John Wesley viewed himself as both minister and physician during his missionary experience in Georgia. English clergy viewed this as part of their job description. After returning to England, John Wesley became quickly aware that both caring of souls and bodies was important. He said, "I saw how many were sick who had no help." Poverty prevented many from trying some of the most basic remedies so he set up a free dispensary to provide medicines, first in Bristol and then in London in 1746.

Apparently this was very successful judging from the statistics that Wesley kept in his journals. Wesley was wise enough to accept there were limits to what could be effectively delivered through the dispensary work, and by him and his fellow workers. So they treated only chronic cases referring acute ones to licensed physicians. It was Wesley's keen interest in traditional and contemporary cures for ailments which led him, in 1747, to publish Primitive Physic, or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases. The book was essentially a manual of self help for those who could not afford a physician. The impact and popularity of Primitive Physic spoke for itself: it ran to thirty-two editions, being regularly updated and revised, some remedies being removed, others added.

Once publication began of Primitive Physic, Wesley encouraged itinerant preachers and others to leave copies in Methodist homes along with an abridged copy of Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ. One was a guide to physical care, the other to spiritual life. Early on, by 1745 Wesley was encouraging every Methodist society to

include a person who held the role “visitor of the sick.” This person provided emotional support, medical advice and also spiritual guidance.

By contrast, when you read Wesley’s letters, he’s open to the notion of God working providentially, but his assumption is that in cases of physical ailment it is always God’s deepest intent and desire to heal. The primary purpose is not to inflict an illness in order to bring spiritual renewal, but that illness is part of the fallen-ness of the world. So the idea that physical wellness is always God’s hope for us is very essential to John Wesley and very central to the work he did in collecting and giving medical advice.

John Wesley also made a correction to a theology which was not prevalent in his day: that illness, pestilence and pandemics were not judgments from God. Clearly in reading Wesley’s journals one can conclude that Wesley understood that it was always God’s deepest intent and desire to bring healing to a broken world. He understood illness was part of fallen, imperfect humanity rather than infliction by God to bring about spiritual renewal. Both Wesley brothers affirmed and prayed for divine healing but at the same time insisted that people use and practice the best medical advice known to them. If you read the preface of Primitive Physic he stated that the most important thing a person could do is to take care of themselves before sickness visited them! The preface promoted well-being, exercise and diet to help prevent illness. If Wesley was with us today during this pandemic of Covid 19, he would ask us to heed the advice of physicians and those heading up the response to prevent its further spread. Furthermore, he would probably add, do not neglect your spiritual disciplines which bring us even closer to the Great Healer.

## **7) Superintendent’s Editorial**

Friends, may I say, this is a time to pray.

Please pray for those who lead our nations and states.

Pray for those who are making decisions that affect thousands and millions of people around the world.

Pray especially for the older ones among us, whom this virus seems to hit especially hard.

Pray for health care workers and first responders.

Pray for those you know whose lives have been radically disrupted.

Pray for teachers and students, trying to finish the school year.

Pray against the spirit of fear that is trying to grip our nation.

Pray for appropriate caution and courage.

And then, give God thanks for your blessings, for we are a blessed, blessed people.

And then, how about we do one more thing: turn off the news.

Yes...turn off the news.

Be informed, certainly. But to be informed is not the same as to be addicted, and chances are, watching too much of the news is only making you either more angry or more afraid.

Turn off the news.

Instead, make a call or two to those you know, or suspect, are lonely.

Go outside, as you are able, and enjoy the spring blessings of the day, and remember: God is good and He is with us. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed.

## **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 (\*of which we're aware)

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](mailto: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 the church at Ephesus, likening the open door Jesus promises with the open door of the tomb that Jesus pioneered and now provides for all who follow Him.

**Quote:** *“Speak evil of no one; else your word especially would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you come to the person concerned.” ~ John Wesley, 12 Rules for Preachers*

**Joke:**



Blessings on your Easter Sunday!

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