

Good Friday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 45th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending May 22, 2020.

-----The Critical-----

Announcements

1) Annual Conference 2020 Update: As has been mentioned, our delegates have voted, granting the BOA to consider and vote on all conference matters until we can meet together in person. That BOA meeting will be held via Zoom on Friday, June 5 at 7:00p. We are also scheduling an conference-wide, in-person gathering (if COVID restrictions permit) in Wilmore on August 29, which will serve as our ordination service. Please mark your calendar, but at this point, in pencil. ☺

The MEG and MAC met this past Tuesday and approved the final documents for next year. Once the BOA has approved them, they will be released to all in notebook form. Also, once we can begin meeting together in person, the superintendent search will resume.

2) Resources Regarding Reopening Your Church: Since there are many states and localities involved in our conference, and many different approaches to worship and size of congregations, my best counsel to you is to follow your state and local guidelines for your worship gatherings. I think the main thrust of the guidance includes:

Encourage the aged and vulnerable to stay away from crowds.

Avoid physical contact...keep appropriate distances and wear masks.

Limit socialization

No child-care or close group meeting

If you can continue online, do so.

Just FYI, Wilmore will begin offering in-person worship on June 14 at 33% of our sanctuary seating capacity, likely multiple services, perhaps concurrent video streaming in the gym. We are asking people to make reservations, so we know when we're full, and people will be seated in family groups at 6' spacing. Since the preponderance of the medical community counsels against it, due to the aerosolization of particles and the ease of spreading, we will not be singing in our worship services for the time-being. We are continuing to offer online services.

3) A Few Pastoral Comments: As one might expect in any sizable group of people, much difference of opinion exists about all that has happened in the last few months and in our convictions about how we should respond. And that's good and legitimate.

The great challenge of living in community with other people, though, has always been choosing to love those who disagree with us. The world does not do this well; watch the news and you'll see. Yet it is at this very point that the body of Christ can shine a bright light, if it so chooses. All over the world, people are watching others fight and argue over all manner of things related to these events of today. It's happening in the news, on social media, in our governments and in our neighborhoods...and it will happen in churches unless we decide that it will not.

It's easy to say we love people. It's something else to actually put that love into action. Some of us have felt that tension as we interact with people with whom we disagree, especially over the different aspects of this virus.

Yet we must choose to love those who disagree with us, not just in sentiment, but through our comments, actions, posts and decisions. This is not an option for followers of Jesus. Jesus says in John 13:34-35, "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" We must decide that we will obey Him in this.

Then, we need to pray that the Spirit of God would give us the divine grace and compassion to love in ways and amounts beyond that which we may be able to stir up within ourselves, because the potential for division in these days is strong...the concerns and convictions among us are important and run deep, but if we are to be the witness for unity the Lord designed His church to be to our world, we'll have to consciously depend on Him for the power required.

To add to this, whether we realize it or not, we are all struggling with some form of grief in these days. We have all lost, to some degree – opportunities, relationships, celebrations, milestones, even the normal cadence of life, and loss and grief magnify the potential for division and even greater loss and harm, because they turn our attentions inward and cause us to snap at people, to react rather than respond, and to make mountains of things that are not so big or such a threat in reality.

Through the years, many have found Kubler-Ross' identified stages of grief helpful – as one might find the diagnosis of a pain helpful; it's not as an excuse for behavior, but it can be a tool to help identify what we're feeling and why.

The stages are: Shock, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Testing, and Acceptance. And by the way, these are not perfectly linear – we may well cycle through some of them several times – but in times of grief and loss, we all experience at least some of them on our way to resolution and wholeness.

We are all, very likely, somewhere on that continuum due to all the change that this virus, and the world's response to it, has brought to us, and I simply offer this in hope that our ability to name what we're feeling may help us on to the next stage and to healing. I also offer it to help us understand that, though we're all going through the same overall "thing," we are in different places in our responses. This means even greater grace is required for a community to remain unified. We are not called to be, and should never aspire to be, uniform; but we are called to be unified.

And such grace does exist in Christ. This is precisely where a Wesleyan approach to God's Spirit is helpful: God really does want to change the way we act, react, view and think about other people. He's not about just putting bandages on symptoms. He wants to actually change the hearts of His people...to re-form our heart, making us others-centered, as Jesus was others-centered. And the "frustrating" thing about this is, God does this, more often than not, in times of hardship and conflict. It's usually when we're in the midst of "not-business-as-usual" days that He has our attention and, consequently, the most room to work on and in us.

So in all the disagreement and grief and change and unsettledness we're experiencing, we may also be on the cusp of the greatest work God has ever done in His Church and world. That would be just like Him, wouldn't it?

There's no doubt He'd like to do it. Will we be a part of it? That decision He leaves to us.

Church of the Week: Please keep our work in Bowling Green (KY) – Fountain Square Ministries, with Pastors Roger and Deb Ryan in your prayers in these days.

Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern; in-person schedule subject to COVID restrictions)

May 28:	Conference Pastors' Zoom, 7:00p
June 5:	BOA Zoom, 7:00p – Conference Business
June 8:	ABS (Area Bishop and Superintendents) Zoom, 3:00p
June 11:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
July 19-26:	NSC Kids and Teen Camp (half the week kids, half teens) – pending restrictions
August 9-11:	ABS Zoom, 3:00p
August 13:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
August 21	BOA Zoom, 7:00p
August 25-28:	Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis
August 29:	NSC Adjourned Sitting / Ordination – Wilmore (Proposed)
September 10:	DL Zoom, 9:30a

September 11-13: NSC Family Camp – pending restrictions
September 23-25: New Room Conference, Nashville, TN
October 6-8: Global Overseer’s Team, Indianapolis
October 16: DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
October 16: BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
October 17: MEG / MAC Meeting – Wilmore, 8:00a
November 12: DL Zoom, 9:30a
December 10: DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 19: DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
March 19: BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
March 20: MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00a

And now...

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Resources, Articles and Attachments

- 1) **A National Memorial Day Concert** is happening on this Sunday evening at 8:00e. [Click here for that information.](#)
- 2) **On the Subject of Unity**, [click here for a helpful article](#) from thegospelcoalition.org.
- 3) **Pray for Graduates** What a story this years’ graduates will have to tell to their children! Let’s keep all our grads in our prayers in these days, and give them our sincere congratulations!

Job Openings

At this point, I know that we will have five pastoral openings in conference churches over the summer. I am also conducting interviews with potential pastors. Please keep this process in your prayers – that the Lord would provide shepherds for His flock.

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

June Birthdays (*that we know of)

Scott Clark – June 4
Joy Ireland – June 11
Ryan Bigham – June 14
Burnie Reynolds – June 18
James Demaray – June 19

*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’m continuing the series on some of the “not-business-as-usual” events in the Bible, looking at the command of God for Israel to be sure to remember Him in their second attempt to enter the promised land. Deuteronomy 8 is my text.

Quote(s): “Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in. He attaches far more importance to godly intercourse than we do. Since union is strength, he does his best to promote separation.”
~ Charles Spurgeon

Joke: [Click here for, what I think is a very funny little video clip.](#) My strange sense of humor may well be revealed here. 😊

Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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