



March 14, 2020

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's times like these that elicit great fear and anxiety in our community and around the world. Before I begin, please remember the witness of Scripture:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?. –Psalm 27:1 NRSV

We all know and believe that God is sovereign over all affairs, but God also calls us to be wise and discerning. Much has changed in the last 48 hours in regard to our thinking about coronavirus response measures. In that time, a national emergency has been declared, and many institutions in our area have gone into “long distance” mode. However, the evidence as it pertains to our area is that we have only one confirmed case in Sullivan County, and no known cases in Southwest Virginia. Though this will change, these are the facts as we have them.

After discussing this with the session, and reflecting prayerfully upon it myself, I think a few things need to change immediately so as to protect everyone's health, and to be a good neighbor to our community by doing our part to halt the spread of the disease.

With this in mind, here is what we are planning to do:

- 1) We will worship on Sunday, March 15 at our regular times. However, these changes will apply to our programming:**
 - a. If you are over the age of 60, traveled outside the area recently, or are immunocompromised, we respectfully ask that you reconsider attending. If you are sick, please, do not come.
 - b. Please use lots of hand sanitizer, and please, please wash your hands often. Practice these measures out of respect for your neighbor.
 - c. Kids' Kirk, Children's Sunday School, and Student Ministry programming is cancelled. The nursery will be closed. Staff led studies are cancelled, and we also ask other Bible study groups to consider cancelling as well.

- d. We will have no coffee. Instead, we will have individually wrapped snacks, and bottles of water. If you want coffee, bring your own coffee.
- e. Choir for the 11am service is cancelled. We will sing congregational hymns only.
- f. Lenten Evensong is cancelled.
- g. We ask that congregants do their best to sit with some distance between neighbors.
- h. We will not share the peace of Christ. Instead, we will have a responsive sharing of the peace of Christ as a community that does not involve handshaking, etc.
- i. We will not pass the offering plate around. Instead, offering plates will be placed at each of the entrances, and we ask that you place your offerings there.
- j. Scheduled committee meetings for Sunday will have the option of teleconferencing. Instructions will be sent to committee members.

2) After Sunday:

- a. All scheduled committee meetings will take place by teleconferencing. Instructions will be sent out to committee members.
- b. All Bible studies on the church campus are cancelled. We also ask that those who meet privately in homes reconsider meeting as well.
- c. There is no scheduled Wednesday night programming.
- d. Church employees will be asked to attend to their duties on an as-needed basis.
- e. All appointments at the church office are cancelled, and all scheduled visitations are cancelled with the exception of those aiding congregants in need.

3) Here are the positive steps we will take to provide worship opportunities for the homebound, and care for our community through the week.

- a. We will livestream our worship service at 9am, complete with singing, and a children's sermon with Lilly only. About 45 minutes after the livestream completes, it should be available to everyone to watch at any time thereafter.
- b. We will livestream a children and student lesson starting at 10:15am.
- c. We recommend you subscribe to our Youtube channel so you will both have access to this content, and be notified when new videos, announcements, and the like drop. To see new sermons and worship services, you can access that through our website at <https://fpcbristol.org/sermons/> .You can follow all our posts,

subscribe, and watch directly on at

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPzMkqG5tOpU7JqvcK4lx6w> .

- d. Because we are asking that Bible studies suspend meeting on Sunday and during the week, we will also record two short Bible studies online and post them to the Youtube site. We will post these on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon.
- e. The cleaning staff have already begun to take preventative measures in cleaning, including but not limited to stronger disinfectants used, and all touchable surfaces cleaned. We will redouble our cleaning efforts to make sure that we are taking all precautions to disinfect meeting areas.
- f. We will be organizing the session, deacons, and other volunteers to respond on an emergency basis for those in need. **If you have a need (supplies from the store, for example), please contact the church office and let us know.** We will do our best to help you.

As you can see, this plan regards this Sunday and the coming week. The session will have an emergency meeting on Sunday at 10:15am to discuss further steps we might take. If there are changes to our plans for Sunday, March 22, we will notify you by Thursday, March 19. We will monitor this situation on a week-by-week basis.

Beyond all this, please hold our community, Bristol, the nation, and the world in your prayers. Pray for all leaders that wise decisions will be made. Pray that this disease will halt its spread. Also, beyond praying, we have an opportunity to bear faithful witness to our community. Be a good neighbor. Don't hoard, but share. Find ways to be a blessing and an encouragement to others. Let faith, not fear, rule your hearts.

In Christ,



Rev. Samuel Weddington
Pastor