

Greetings to CCOGM District: (Dated March 17, 2020)

These last days have been ones many of us never dreamed we would experience, no doubt leaving us with more questions than answers. As a society (and arguably as a modern global village), we are in uncharted territory. We're coming to terms with the reality that what, just a few days ago, was "normal" and "sure," no longer is, not to mention that we find ourselves simply guessing at what might await us tomorrow.

As of this morning, the province of Ontario has declared a State of Emergency, as has the city of Calgary. Most European nations have closed their borders and international travel is being largely restricted. If the Coronavirus (Covid-19) is the new enemy, uncertainty is its partner in crime. In many respects, these are unprecedented times.

Many of you are having to make decisions these days you never thought you would need to make, not just in terms of your personal journeys and health, but also in terms of the life and health of the church family you serve.

In the province in which I live (Alberta), our government is encouraging *"All events that expect more than 250 attendees to be cancelled, and events with more than 50 attendees should be cancelled if they include international participants, critical infrastructure staff, seniors or other high risk populations...places of worship are no longer exempt from restrictions on mass gatherings."* Many public facilities besides schools and universities (like YMCAs, libraries, fitness centers) along with many restaurants, theatres, dental and chiropractic offices (amongst numerous others) are closing for the foreseeable future.

In light of this new reality, leaders of church families are wrestling with the question, "How can we best serve our congregation if we can't gather as a community? How can we best serve our faith community remotely?" More on that in a minute.

In view of all of this, allow me to give you the following encouragement:

1. Please keep current and abide by the most recent government guidelines with regard to doing your part to "flatten the curve," that is, of stopping the Coronavirus from spreading. (The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the US is indicating an 8-week cycle on this virus...that very likely may become the timeline we are looking at in terms of recently announced restrictions).

Depending on where you live, you may want to make the decision, as many already have, to suspend your Sunday gatherings for the next number of weeks, knowing that more cancellations may be necessary. Making such a decision not only will fall in line with what your provincial government may be recommending (like here in Alberta), but more importantly falls in line with our calling as followers of Christ to love our neighbours, and particularly the most vulnerable amongst us. Allow me to encourage you to share with others that the reason for this decision is not self-protection, but rather love. Choices like this are not made to minimize our own risk, but to protect others from risk.

To that end, check with your respective provincial health authorities for more information. The links below may be of help to you:

Alberta: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca>

BC: <http://www.phsa.ca>

Manitoba: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/index.html>

Saskatchewan: <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca>

You will also want to get creative to maintain clear communication with your church family members using whatever media you have available to you. This may mean moving to a more on-line presence by way of broadcasting messages or creating and emailing weekly Bible study guides to your members. Do what you can to promote a shared journey in these days.

2. Please know that we are continuing to prepare for the following upcoming events, but are very well aware that we may need to cancel them, particularly the ones in April and May:

Emerge: April 24-26
Theologue: May 12-13
Kids' Camp*: July 20-24
Youth Camp*: July 26-31
Family Camp: July 14-19

In the instance we need to cancel an event, we will do our utmost to communicate it as far in advance as is possible. Again, we are being hopeful and will proceed as if the events are going ahead knowing full well that those functions planned in the near future have a greater probability of being cancelled than those functions planned further in the future.

*Also know that for the kick off of Kids and Youth Camp registration, we are moving the registration opening date to April 28.

3. Finally, as leaders be of good courage in these uncertain times. With some of the irrational reactions you may have witnessed or read about recently in response to the news being broadcast, what is needed most these days is grounded, faith-filled, level-headed people who model for others a hope and steadfastness that is anchored in Jesus. Do your best to model and communicate such qualities.

You may find the following words from C.S. Lewis (written some 72 years ago) of encouragement. As you read, simply replace "atomic bomb" with "Coronavirus."

"In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. "How are we to live in an atomic age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents."

*In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—*anesthetics*; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.*

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds." ("On Living in an Atomic Age" (1948) in Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays)

Praying for you all,

George Lutzer
Executive Director

Canadian Church of God Ministries

Unit 102, 4909B – 48 Street
Camrose AB T4V 1L7
Ph. 780-672-0772