



## CHRIST CHURCH CONWAY

Dear Christ Church,

As the Session has considered how to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we have made the following decisions:

- Corporate Worship will be suspended for the next three weeks;
- there will be a Sunday morning devotional on Facebook live at 10:30 am via the church's Facebook page on each Sunday we do not meet;
- the Session has called a meeting for March 29 to decide how to move forward with Corporate Worship in April;
- the March Potluck has been cancelled;
- Youth Group has been cancelled until further notice;
- the decision to suspend or continue the various small groups that are part of Christ Church Conway will be left up to the individual groups.

Regarding the small groups, the Session offers the following pastoral counsel. Due to the organic nature of small groups at Christ Church Conway, the Session of Christ Church Conway is leaving the final decision of whether to continue or suspend meetings to the discretion of the individual groups. However, we do ask the following. In deciding how your group will move forward, operate from a posture of dependence on God for his mercy in the full freedom of the gospel calling out to him for wisdom and guidance in what to do. If you decide not to meet, consider how you can stay in contact with the members of your group to continue building one another up in the love of Christ. If you decide to meet, consider what precautions may be prudent in how you gather. Additionally, if you choose to meet, we would ask that you devote some part of your time to pray that God might quickly bring both the virus and the unrest it has spawned to an end.

Additionally, we would encourage the small groups associated with Christ Church Conway to be creative in considering ways to continue caring for one another. If the decision is made to suspend meeting face-to-face, consider meeting as a group via FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, or some other platform. Stay in contact with each other to know how to pray for one another or meet physical needs that may arise. In short, continue ministering to one another.

We want to assure you that we did not make these decisions out of fear but out of concern for our neighbors both within and outside of Christ Church Conway. Within our church, several individuals fall into one of the high-risk categories. We want to serve these individuals and their families well by not leaving them excluded from the life of the church, but joining with them in thinking creatively about ways to continue to minister to one another in this time. As we think about our broader community, we also want to serve it well in love. The Session believes one way we can do this effectively is by doing all we can to help curb the spread of this virus. The most effective way to do that is not gathering for now. An excerpt from Martin Luther regarding how to respond to the plague was particularly helpful to us. He wrote in a letter to a fellow pastor,

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. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God (Martin Luther, Works v. 43, p. 132. Letter "Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague" written to Rev. Dr. John Hess).

We encourage you to make decisions not for fear of the virus, but out of the fear of God, who sovereignly cares for us and calls us to care for our neighbors both inside and outside the church. Our goal should not necessarily be to keep ourselves and our families from becoming infected---indeed, although there are practical things we can and should do to reduce the risk of infection, on a basic level we cannot control whether we get sick. Rather, our goal is to care for those who are most vulnerable in our church and community by slowing the spread of the virus, helping to keep hospitals from becoming overwhelmed and thus ensuring that those who do get sick can receive proper medical care. We encourage you to educate yourself about the virus, and about practical steps you can take to prevent its spread, to help you make wise decisions. The following links contain helpful information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<https://www.flattenthecurve.com/>

At the same time, it is all too easy to become obsessed with reading news reports and social media posts about the current situation, which at best is an unhelpful use of time and at worst spreads fear and misinformation. Instead, spend your time in prayer for our church, our city, our country, and the world, and consider how we can still serve, encourage, and build one another up in love.

Grace and Peace in Christ our Savior,  
Kevin for the Session of Christ Church Conway