

Dear Carlton Oaks Church family,

As you are probably aware, on Wednesday the coronavirus outbreak was officially classified as a pandemic. Yesterday national, state and local governments called for appropriate precautions including canceling public gatherings over a certain number of people and reducing social contact. I want you to know that I am watching how this develops and praying for wisdom on how to respond as it unfolds. As a church we will take appropriate precautions out of love for one another and also to continue encouraging one another to put our hope and trust in Christ throughout this trial (as we should in any trial).

This coronavirus outbreak may be a unique experience for us, but it is not unique in the history of the world or the history of the church. From the beginning Christ's church has been a beacon of light in the darkness and a consistent source of love, support, and care in the face of physical illnesses. This outbreak is just another opportunity to show the love and peace of Christ to a world that is hurting, confused, and scared. As always, we turn to God's Word for guidance:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)*

Our ability to comfort those around us in the midst of trial and confusion flows from our own experience of God's comfort. Through the gospel, God shows us the true depth of his love. Now, we can trust that he will continue to love us and care for us through any trial. The reality of God's love produces a humble confidence that allows us to be concerned and cautious about the dangers in our world without being overwhelmed by fear or anxiety.

*Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5–7)*

In every situation, God calls us to prayer that is characterized by thanksgiving. When the headlines scream that “the sky is falling”—whether for political, environmental, cultural, or any other reason—thankful prayer is our response. We find true peace in the midst of any storm when we remember God's sovereign power, his goodness, his love, and his faithfulness.

God's greatest concern in the midst of this global trial is for our hearts, that we would cling to him and trust in him. But there are also practical concerns that we want to take into consideration, particularly out of love for one another. Since there are many in our church family and our broader community who are older, physically weaker, or have underlying medical conditions, love guides us to take precautions to minimize the spread of the coronavirus in our community.

Corporate worship is an important priority for every Christian, especially during times of societal isolation and fear, but we want to be wise in our gathering. At this time we will continue to meet for worship on Sunday mornings. But, here are a few practical precautions we are putting in place:

- If you or one of your children has a fever, a cough, or any other flu-like symptoms we ask you to please stay home from all church activities

- We ask that as you greet one another you do so without physical contact such as shaking hands or hugs. We will also suspend our “meet and greet” time during the service for the time being.
- We ask that everyone regularly wash your hands and use hand sanitizer. We will be placing a bottle of hand sanitizer near the entrance of the sanctuary that is available for use.
- We will not be passing the offering plate in order to take the morning offering. Instead, at the close of service, ushers will stand by the exit with offering plates. Prayer request cards and offering envelopes may be placed in the plates at that time.

We will continue to hold all of our regular public worship services and activities until we are told not to by the local health authorities. For additional information about this crisis... both in terms of more accurate information and Christian perspective, we commend the following sources:

[COVID-19 Coronavirus datapack](#) – a helpful infographic showing coronavirus statistics

[The FAQs: Coronavirus Explained by an Infectious Disease Expert and Pastor](#) (Miguel Nunez)

[Gripping Fear \(and the Corona Virus\)](#) – dealing with fear in the midst of the crisis

[Should churches meet during Coronavirus?](#)

If you have any concerns or needs as this situation unfolds, please reach out to me or one of the other leaders in the church. We are here to serve and love one another. And it's our joy to care for you in any way we can.

I pray that the Lord will continue to strengthen you and provide you opportunities to show love to your neighbors through this season. In a world that is captivated by fear, the message of the gospel is a sweet and refreshing truth. Thank God for the privilege to be the ones who get to share that message with the hurting, confused, and afraid around us.

Grace and peace,

Craig

