



CAMPBELL STREET CHURCH of CHRIST

The last several days have created a whirlwind of uncertainty and anxiety for everyone. As the servant leader over health, I wanted to let you know how our church family has responded, is responding, and will continue to respond to the historic events unfolding before our eyes.

Although I am a neonatologist, I have always been fascinated with infectious disease and began paying attention to the events unfolding in China back in December. While there have been attempts by viruses in the past to make it to the “global pandemic” stage, this one began to have some unique qualities that made me concerned as we saw it progress around the world in January and into February. Once it became clear that this would indeed become an issue in the US, the elders and I had our first meeting on March 10 to discuss short and long term plans for changes to how we worship and how we will support each other during this time. We immediately formed a **Health Crisis Response Team** to provide advice and to begin brainstorming on how we will meet the needs of our family. This team includes physicians, nurses, ministry staff, and other wise individuals who will share their gifts and talents as we navigate what lies ahead, using the information that is available. As we already experienced this past week, things can change quickly and plans may need to adapt. Please be patient and flexible.

I want to emphasize a few important points.

There is a lot of information and misinformation out there. The Health Crisis Response Team and all other groups working on this issue to support our church are here to help our spiritual family make this journey together and we will do our best to interpret this information and make recommendations to the elders and to you. We haven't experienced anything like this in our lifetime and are being careful in an attempt to keep you safe. Please take the advice of our government and our shepherds seriously. You can look at what is happening in Italy currently and what is beginning to happen to the rest of Europe as an example of what will happen here if we get this early response wrong. My take on the situation is that “social distancing” will become the norm for the next couple of months, if not longer, as an attempt is made for us to help those most at risk to avoid the infection and to prevent the inundation of illness to our healthcare system.

Currently understood risk groups include:

- those 60 years of age and over
- those with a long-term medical condition – for example, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, cancer or high blood pressure
- those with a weak immune system (immunosuppressed) from cancer treatment, treatment for autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis (MS), inflammatory bowel diseases, have HIV, or have had an organ transplant or a bone-marrow transplant.

There is concern that the obese and the pregnant may also fall into the at risk category and if you fall into any of these groups, I advise extreme caution and careful social isolation during this time.

For the rest of you, I want to slightly mis-quote Mordecai in Esther 4:14: “You may have come into your position for a time such as this!” There is a large group of our family due to age and good health that will be slightly inconvenienced (maybe a little more) when you get this virus. You have been gifted in some way and we will need you to use these gifts in service to others in a time such as this! Please look for opportunities! While our Sunday morning services are in “social isolation” at this time, we will stay connected through e-mail and social media so you remain plugged in and can continue to serve the body of Christ.

Finally, let me leave you with a personal thought. The class I co-teach on Sunday morning has spent a lot of time in Matthew 24 and 25 recently. It is not a fun section of scripture, but maybe we have been led to discuss this for a time such as this. In Matthew 24:3, the disciples ask Jesus: “what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Luke’s parallel version in chapter 21:9-11 says: “‘When you hear of wars and revolutions, don’t be terrified! These things must happen first, but the end will not come immediately.’ Then Jesus continued, ‘Nation will fight against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be terrible *earthquakes, famines, and dreadful diseases* in various places. Terrifying sights and miraculous signs will come from the sky.’” “All these are the beginning of birth pains,” records Matthew 24:8.

I don’t know for certain if the birth pains that precede the glorious return of the Son of Man are increasing in intensity, but it sure feels like it. In verses 12 & 13, Jesus tells us that during this time and “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” We are entering a time of “social isolation,” anxiety, and upheaval, let’s make sure our love for our Savior does not grow cold. Our ministry staff will be working on material and studies to help us stand firm in this time so we are ready when our bridegroom comes (Matthew 25:1-13). Participate in the new way we will worship together and look for the gifts that will arise from this opportunity to do “church” differently and be with your family a good bit more than normal.

Jesus' answer to His disciples' questions comes to a somewhat surprising end in Matthew 25:31-46. It's a familiar passage about the Day we should all be longing to see: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

Here's what has always been odd to me. He didn't ask them if they got some theological point just right. He didn't ask them if they came to the building every Sunday. He didn't ask them a lot of things that I probably would choose to ask. Instead, after just describing the tumultuous events that would precede His glorious return He said this: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

I have a feeling that we will have a lot of opportunities to serve our brothers and sisters in the coming months and in doing so serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you are low risk, look for those opportunities and alert others when you have found them. If you are high risk, tell us of your needs so we can meet them and in doing so give us a chance to serve Jesus.

May the peace of the Spirit be upon you during this time,

Scott Guthrie, MD, FAAP