

To all Leaders

I greet you warmly in Jesus' Name.

Government advice in respect of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) contains more stringent requirements which are designed to limit ways in which the virus can spread. People are being asked to avoid meeting in places like hotels, theatres and other settings where people meet in significant numbers. Obviously, this includes church meetings.

Therefore, there should be no meetings for local churches with immediate effect, including this coming Sunday, until further notice.

I reiterate that the Government has taken its decision in the expectation that it will slow the pace at which COVID-19 will spread through the community. The reason for this is to relieve pressure on the NHS, which could not meet the demand for its services if COVID-19 continued to spread at the rate that was evident last week. Limiting opportunities for people being together in group settings (e.g. churches, theatres, hotels) should slow the rate at which infection appears. This will allow the NHS the capacity to treat patients that it otherwise could not.

It is no light matter for a government to ask the country to virtually close up for an undefined period. The impact on every sphere of life is extreme as are the consequences of doing nothing. Just like the consequences of doing too little. One has only to look at other countries to see the loss of life and while the loss of life is relatively low in the UK at this stage, let's remind ourselves that these are not just statistics – each one is a person, each one precious. The actions taken are to preserve life.

Similarly, it is no light matter for churches to close public meetings. It is done for the same reason. The church is a responsible citizen of the community and will act in society's best interests. Therefore, we will play our part in order to limit the opportunity for COVID-19 to spread.

There may be those who say that the church should meet anyway. Such an attitude reveals the complete absence of care for those you lead as well as the absence of leadership, the first characteristic of which is to know how to follow. Such an action would be with complete disregard for vulnerable people, those who by reason of age or with underlying medical conditions are specifically exposed to this contagious disease. It would be to disregard others, such as pregnant women who, with their unborn babies, may also be vulnerable.

No doubt, many local churches will provide online services and programs to their people. I will endeavour to collate and communicate these and let you know so that you can share them with your people. If you are planning an online service, please let me know so that others may join in.

Your leadership is crucial at this time. Our people must continue to pray, to worship, to serve and to give. Calamity produces opportunity and there is an opportunity for the church of the twenty first century to be as the church of the first century – that is, a church not defined by, or limited to, a Sunday service. The church has the opportunity to be active in the community, do good, serve needs, live out the Gospel, love Jesus and point people to Him.

Let's not be so blinded by calamity that we miss opportunity.

It would be a great opportunity to call your people to prayer in-their-own-home for an hour at 9am on Sunday morning.

In closing, Luke's words in Acts 8 are both powerful and prescriptive: '*But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.*' (v4). In a season of 'scattering', let's encourage our people to live out the Good News everywhere.

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