

Saturday, March 14, 12:00 PM

On Wednesday, March 11th 2020 the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus or COVID-19 to be a pandemic. This is uncharted territory for all of us. We have never had to deal with something like this before. It is important that we respond wisely, courageously, compassionately and with faith.

The following communication is a bit long, but please read the whole thing because the elders convey a decision about this Sunday, March 15.

Expert Advice

Based on advice from Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, and the experts at the COVID-19 Command Table, the Minister of Education issued a Ministerial Order to close all publicly funded schools in Ontario for two weeks following March break, in response to the emergence in Ontario of COVID-19. Maranatha Christian Academy in Windsor will also close until April 3.

Ontario's top doctor has also warned residents against leaving the country unless absolutely necessary and recommended the "immediate suspension" of all events with more than 250 people to fight COVID-19.

Local Response

However, many Windsor-Essex officials are taking a modified approach. As of Friday afternoon at 2:02 PM, local health officials issued this statement: "The Windsor Essex County Health Unit is stressing that there have been **zero confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Windsor and Essex County** as of Friday, March 13th at 1:00pm. Dr. Wajid Ahmed, Chief Medical Officer of Health for the Windsor Essex County Health Unit (who also happens to be my next door neighbor) says 50 people have been tested locally and all have tested negative."

On Friday at 5:30 p.m. we received an email from the Town of LaSalle. "Town of LaSalle Operations in Response to Coronavirus: The Town of LaSalle will host activities as planned at the Vollmer Culture and Recreation Complex over the March Break week. Following advice of the Windsor Essex County Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Wajid Ahmed, there is no need to close recreation facilities at this time. There are currently no cases of 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Windsor and Essex County. The overall risk is low for residents of Windsor and Essex County."

In a personal conversation on Saturday morning (Mar. 14) with administration at the Libro Centre in Amherstburg, we learned that "as of now the plan is to go forward with all programming including the day camp for March break and rentals as usual; increased cleaning protocols are in place and signage to be vigilant about hand washing and limit personal contact." Of course, that may change.

The Gathering Response

It is clear that we have a wide-ranging response locally. Some churches are cancelling services and others are not. The question is: What shall we do? We respect the science, the medical professionals, and our government. What is the wise, compassionate, faithful response for The Gathering? How has the Lord been leading *our elders* in this very tough decision?

Service on Sunday March 15

The elders have been monitoring things closely for several days, and we have made the decision to offer a **scaled-down service this Sunday, March 15 at 10 AM**, for those who wish to come. We do not disapprove of anyone who decides to stay home. Do what is right for you and your family. At this point, we are only planning to adopt this format for this Sunday. We will wait to review the best recommendations of provincial and city health officials before determining a plan for March 22nd and beyond.

We will hold a simple service at The Gathering at 10:00 AM this Sunday with **no children's ministry**. If you choose to bring your children with you to the service, they are welcome to sit with you in the worship centre.

Offering baskets will be placed near the entrance/exit doors to the Worship Center.

We will make the **sermon** available online after the service as quickly as possible, and you can find it on our website at <http://www.thegatheringwindsor.com> and on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/TheGatheringWindsor/>.

Physical Contact

Regardless of how it feels to whom, the practice of foregoing physical contact (hugging, handshakes, and even fist bumps) has been demonstrated to flatten out the infection curve and slow the spread of this type of virus. Let's forego the customary hugs and handshakes in favour of waves and nods. For the introverts among us, this will feel like heaven on earth, whereas for the more socially wired this will feel like a sacrifice of love.

No matter what safety precautions we put in place, some people will stay home, and that is okay. We urge anyone with underlying health issues to remain at home. Many of our senior seniors and those with underlying health conditions should not enter a public place at this time. We likely will not surpass the 250 mark in attendance this Sunday, so technically we are under the "large gathering ban."

Most of the people who contract the coronavirus will simply feel as if they have a cold or flu and therefore, they may be tempted to "tough it out" and carry on with normal activities. However, given the multi-generational nature of church, while you are "toughing it out" you may be passing on the virus to vulnerable seniors who are not as well fortified against this illness. Out of love and concern for these seniors, we must encourage all those who are feeling sick to stay home.

Wash your hands frequently and vigorously

As silly as it sounds, this is one of the most important things you can do to help flatten the curve of this virus. Do it. Wash your hands under hot water with soap while singing Happy Birthday twice. It takes 20 seconds.

Do not hoard

Hoarding is unloving. When you buy 240 rolls of toilet paper or 17 canisters of Lysol wipes you are depriving your neighbours of what they need. Their families are important too. Christians are supposed to be the “share and sacrifice” people not the “hoard and deprive” people. Buy what you need to self-isolate for 14 days and nothing more. If you have been hoarding toilet paper or Lysol wipes consider making your pastor and elders/deacons aware of this so that they can distribute your excess product to seniors in need.

Keep Giving Please

If you don't already, you can contribute your offerings through our Pushpay© online giving option so we can continue to function as a local church. Even with COVID-19, we have bills to pay and salary obligations to meet. Your support is critical at a time like this.

The information for Pushpay can be found here: <https://pushpay.com/g/thegathering?src=hpp>. To create a Pushpay account from The Gathering's giving page:

1. Click on <https://pushpay.com/g/thegathering?src=hpp>, complete all fields and click **Next**.
2. Enter your mobile number and click **Send Code**. Enter security code (delivered via text message) and tap **Next**.
3. Complete all fields and click **Next**. Enter your payment details and click **Next**.
4. Confirm all payment details and click **Give**.
5. Look for an emailed receipt to confirm your email.

Enter the hope of the gospel!

Our witness is bold: God exists. By His power, for His glory, He created all there is—out of nothing. But humanity, created in His image, rebelled. As a result, brokenness in the world and death has been our norm.

This brokenness takes on many forms—natural disasters, poverty, sickness—and an unpredictable, invisible virus that has jolted the world.

Beginning in Eden, God has pursued reconciliation with sinners, making redemption the story of the Bible, with Jesus' crucifixion as the focal point of history. On that day, Jesus satisfied God's wrath toward sin.

Today, anyone who looks to Jesus by faith, in repentance, will be born again, adopted, forgiven, declared not guilty, and indwelt by God's Spirit. In our redemption, Christ has taken away the fear of death.

Our current challenges have a singular effect on Jesus' Church—hope! Amid the coronavirus, while doing our part for a hurting community, Jesus' Church looks up. We find ourselves increasingly longing for His return and serving others as we wait. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

I've said it before a thousand times, but this time it has much more meaning: May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all! Amen!

Garth