



Memo: Coronavirus, Update #2
March 11, 2020
From the Desk of Pastor Chad

As of this morning, Wednesday, March 11, 2020, we have now heard of the first, confirmed case of COVID-19 in Hanover County, VA. The patient has been in quarantine since arriving back in the United States, and we pray for both his care and recovery.

While not directly connected to anyone in our congregation, allow me to update just a bit on where things stand with New Song's ongoing preparation and response to the news of novel, community-spread, direct contact and ministry-related concerns. In no particular order, here are a few responses to the questions we have fielded thus far:

1). "Why are you responding in this way? Coronavirus has been around for years."

If you look at the back of a can of Lysol or similar cleaning agent, you will indeed see the word "coronavirus." This information is not new; however, COVID-19 "Coronavirus" is not the same. Yes, coronavirus has been around for years in different forms, but the current epidemic is set apart from the previously classified strain/type. Our response has attempted to be accurate, measured and not anxiety-inducing; rather, we are committed to reading through the available information and relaying what we can from accurate, trusted sources.

2). "What about Communion: I've seen bad hygiene habits on full display with the Cup."

Great question; our staff and leaders have met around this topic numerous times and consulted many resources for feedback and guidance. The Sacraments are critical to both WHO we are and WHAT we do... HOW we observe the Sacraments is a bit more contextual to certain churches and denominations. Some congregations have the Priest apply the wafer, after being dipped, to one's tongue, while others receive the elements via a plate of crackers and tiny juice cups, and others receive Communion from one loaf and one cup.

Our next two Communion opportunities will be held on April 10, 2020, as part of our Good Friday service, at 7pm, and at the Easter Sunrise Service on April 12, 2020, at 6:30am, at Hollywood Cemetery. For Good Friday, the current plan is to have servers share the elements through a "container" system whereby the juice and wafer are both in a sealed cup. You will be handed these to open on your own, with assistants nearby should anyone require help to open the packaging.



While we know this is not ideal... is any of this? **No!** We have chosen to "make the most" of a difficult situation and honor our strong commitment to the priority of the Sacraments, all while making sure we keep health and safety as top priorities.

3). "What about Heather and Kimbely's counseling ministries?"

Indeed, having a virus spread impacts every aspect of our operation. Heather and Kimbely have both explored different avenues for the needs around providing services without being able to meet face-to-face. We have explored phone options, which are already in use for certain situations, along with the option of an online, HIPPA-approved solution. "Fear not!" as the Bible says... this concern is well under control should we have restrictions on use of the facility.

4). "What about worship: what happens if we aren't allowed to gather at the Church?"

Obviously, we regret that we even have to prepare for any of these concerns (as by the point we reach the call to no longer meet, it means the virus has increased in its impact significantly), and losing our in-person worship service would be detrimental to our worship task on certain levels. However, we are looking into all options. As was mentioned in the previous update, we would immediately switch to an online format for worship whereby our talented staff and volunteers would pull together for either LiveStreaming (via our Facebook page) or other platforms as needed. We would make as many layers of worship available that we can think of: Scripture, songs, prayers, sermon, giving and tithing, comfort, care, etc. through email and our website. While we are in constant communication to both internal

leaders and external agencies and departments, we know that additional steps are going to be required should this concern grow widespread. We ask for your patience and prayers as we approach each of these tasks; they remain in the “what if” status for now, but do know we are working hard to make sure the Church remains a place of hope and healing during all possibilities of what COVID-19 presents (and beyond).

5). **“Are there devotions or programs available for our children and youth?”**

This answer stands (with or without a virus in play) as a solid **YES!** New Song subscribes to RightNow Media; we invite all parts of our ministries to explore RightNow Media’s contents... **FOR FREE!** For kids, there are lessons, shows, cartoons, studies and more on a variety of topics that all relate to child-appropriate content!

The same response is true for youth... and adults! RightNow Media has a ton of useful materials that I would encourage everyone to check out. You simply need an account (which is free), and then you have access to small group materials, all kinds of programming and shows, daily devotional options, etc.

The best way to get to all these opportunities is found via our website: <https://www.newsongumc.org/rightnow-media> Once on this page, just click the large, orange button at the top and head into *RightNow Media!*

6). **“What about small groups?”**

We do not see how a virus should stop the work of God’s people, but we know COVID-19 could have such an impact. We have ways to help... let us consider:

- Small groups could develop a “Private Facebook Page” whereby only members of their group can participate. You could post daily readings and questions, prayer concerns, needs for assistance and more right on the page for all in your group to see. If this sounds like a good idea, but you need help, just contact our Church Office and we will be happy to help set this up for your group.
- Small groups could consider going all-digital with their conversation through different web options. One of the most prominently used sites is www.zoom.com. Zoom allows everyone in the group to show up on 1 screen through their phone, tablet or computer. You could have a group conversation all at once – even while everyone’s in their pajamas at home! Each person appears on the screen in a small box. Again, if this option is something you would like to consider for your group, please contact the Church Office and we will assist in getting you set-up for Zoom small group options.
- Email-based/text/app small group options: why not prepare now and generate a texting and/or email list ahead of time? An app distribution list? Different apps allow us to remain in communication with each other while having minimal technical skill: *Slack* is one app, for instance. Other texting app are: *GroupMe* or *Remind*.

7). **“What about toilet paper?”**

For now, we are well-stocked in this department; thank you for your concern! I understand hand-sanitizer is in high-demand; please continue to rely upon the last update’s emphasis on frequent hand-washing!

8). **“Where are you getting your information from regarding COVID-19?”**

We have suspended all checking of bogus, conspiracy theory and/or political sites. ☺
Okay, technically: we **never** sought any “advice” on any level from any of the above!

Truth be told: we are on many lists tied to high-emphasis alerts and updates. These include the Hanover County Sheriff’s Department, Hanover County Schools, Hanover County Government, the Hanover County Department of Health, the Virginia Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, etc. We are also alerted for updates from local news affiliates, including their social media accounts and email/text notifications.

9). **“What about special events?”**

When planning such events, we take into account the possibilities of many “what if” concerns, but no one can ever really prepare for something that has as little known about it as COVID-19. We will continue to be in discussion with trusted sources and local officials, our staff, congregation, and wider community. As such, should use of the facility be suspended, we would have no choice but to honor the directive. This would include everything from Easter to the 5K or any festivals, fairs, services, etc. that we may be hosting. We would obviously do all within our power to reschedule the

event at a different date, far-removed from any outbreak concerns. If money is involved, we would honor any refund policies. In short, it pains us to have to consider canceling an event! Not only will we be in conversation with all levels of concern, we would also honor the wisdom of the leaders who feel led to make such a difficult decision.

10). **“What about greeting each other on Sundays? What about Offering Baskets?”**

For now, the practice of shaking hands will be replaced with new ideas... please feel free to become creative. Some are big into elbow bumps and waving; others are into an ankle-to-ankle taps and even just smiling, nodding or using such wild and crazy phrases as: “Good morning!” We see Greeting Times as invaluable towards the goal of connecting with one another, but we are willing to forego signs of physical touch as we journey through this season. *We genuinely hope your smiles will be contagious throughout each worship service (and not your handshakes).*

We will also transition to making use of the **Joy Boxes** for Tithes and Offerings, as is practiced on the first Sundays of the month when we have traditionally offered Holy Communion. Joy Boxes allow us to not pass an object (the baskets) that could be contaminated with germs throughout the congregation from one person to the next. Online giving is yet another option for anyone who might be interested at: www.newsongumc.org/give.

We, of course, continue to clean, Clean, CLEAN and sanitize, Sanitize, SANITIZE throughout the facility every day.

11). **“What about the community?”**

New Song is involved in many ministries that we hope to find a way to support even if a “community lock-down” were to be implemented. The Backpack Ministry would potentially be allowed to continue insofar as having us drop-off backpacks to the schools and allowing families to arrange pick-up opportunities from their offices, for example. We are involved with local FeedMore food distributions and would work to make sure these events still have the option to be held, even if the logistics are required to be amended. We would have other ways to assist: a shut-down always presents new concerns for every aspect of life from hospitals and schools to various population-groups: senior citizens, those who are medically fragile and/or in need of medication assistance, food/grocery needs, gas, childcare situations, etc. The needs will not be hidden and our prayer is that our congregation will be in full gear for both responding to the needs and having a heart for others.

Quite honestly...

Coronavirus is **not** what we had on the schedule for 2020.

We wanted to build, grow and jump into so many dreams – and we still will!

No one likes to talk about a virus, but **not** preparing for its impact is perhaps *foolish*. We have time before the storm hits, so our commitment is to prepare and be as ready as possible – all while hoping to be able to see such protocols never become useful. We encourage you to read Update 1 and Update 2 again.

Join us in making sure the life of your home and the life of the Church are prepared for as high priorities. We are preparing to issue our next update within the next week or as changes in circumstances occur.

Please be in touch, directly, should you have any concerns or questions.

Only the best; will see you very soon!

Faithfully,

Pastor Chad<><

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