

To the congregation of Community Christian Reformed Church:

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

No doubt, many of us are wondering what the appropriate response is to the WHO's declaration of the COVID-19 coronavirus as a pandemic, especially as throughout the region schools, sporting events, and large public gatherings are being suspended. After consulting with medical health professionals in our congregation and reviewing the government's recommendations for our region, the executive team of Administrative Council, together with the pastors, have come to the conclusion that it would be irresponsible for us to conduct church as usual. Our Sunday morning worship service undoubtedly counts as a "large public gathering," as we typically have over 500 people in attendance, many of whom are considered "vulnerable sector" individuals who are uniquely at risk for exposure to this disease. Therefore **we are suspending our regular worship services for this Sunday, March 15.**

We will be reviewing this decision on a weekly basis, but **it is very likely that we will not be able to have our regular Sunday worship services for at least the next three weeks.** Please check your email regularly for communication regarding the service each week.

We do not want to be reactionary or alarmist. Rather, we want to respond to this crisis in responsible and appropriate ways that reflect our convictions as Reformed Christians and followers of Jesus Christ. This means that we take seriously our calling to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as our neighbours, as image-bearers of the Triune God. We ought to check our sinful responses and impulses. Many people in our society have been hoarding supplies such as hand sanitizer and toilet paper. This makes life more difficult for those who live paycheque-to-paycheque and cannot afford to stock up on needed materials that may no longer be readily available. As Christians, we are called to reject greed and instead to share with those in need. Many people of Asian descent in our society have been treated as carriers of the disease, rather than as image-bearers of God. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, any way we "belittle, insult, hate, or kill" our neighbours, or allow others to do the same, is a violation of the eighth commandment. As followers of Jesus, we are instead called to protect others from harm and do good to all. Let us use this opportunity to care in sensitive and intentional ways not only for one another, but also for our neighbours.

The good news is that the church is not a building, it is a body: the body of Christ. And just because we do not meet together at 1275 Bleams Road for worship does not mean that we cease to be the church. While large public gatherings are discouraged, the experts tell us that smaller gatherings pose less of a threat to public health as long as proper hygiene is practiced. And our Lord assures us, "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20, NIV).

Given this reality, and the conviction that corporate worship is vital to our life together as the body of Christ, **we would like to encourage our members to take the opportunity to gather together for worship on Sunday morning in smaller gatherings**, whether as a family, a small group, or a Community. We are asking the elders and other Community leaders to help organize local opportunities for worship. The pastors will be making materials available later today or tomorrow to help facilitate these smaller worship gatherings.

Please take seriously the experts' appeal to practice proper hygiene at these gatherings. This means doing things like thoroughly washing your hands as soon as you arrive, not shaking hands or touching each other, and not handling shared materials with unwashed hands. **Above all, if you feel sick, PLEASE STAY HOME.** Even if you don't feel your symptoms are severe, whatever you have may have a more serious effect on others. Practicing the appropriate personal hygiene, social distancing, and self-quarantine practices recommended by the experts is one of the vital ways we can show the love of Christ to one another in this time.

But we can go beyond that in showing love to one another. We will be sending more specific information to Community elders and deacons, but we encourage all our members to take time to think about ways that you can be the hands and feet of Christ in your neighbourhood and your church Community. **Here are a few ideas:**

- Introduce yourself to any seniors and people with special needs living in your neighbourhood (without shaking their hands!), and offer them your contact information so they can reach out to you in case they need anything during this crisis.
- Call or email church members in your community who are high risk and may be choosing to self-quarantine, including the elderly, those with chronic health conditions, those who have recently felt sick, and those who have recently travelled. Offer to bring a meal, chat on the phone, or run any errands that they may not be able to do themselves.
- Reach out to families affected by the school cancellations and ask how you can support them.
- Reach out to those who work in retail, hospitality, entertainment, food service, or other affected industries to see how they need to be supported in this time. Some may currently be without work and struggling to pay their bills.
- If you have a stockpile of toilet paper or hand sanitizer, let your elder or deacon know so they can use you as a resource for those who may need these items more than you.

**Pray for one another. Encourage one another. Build each other up in the love of Christ.**

A few other items:

- 1) Since it is March break, our regular weekly ministries are not meeting this week. We will be assessing best practices and speaking with ministry leaders over this coming week to determine the appropriate response moving forward.
- 2) For now, the church office will remain open with its regular hours. Staff and pastors are available as usual by phone or email. Please practice proper hygiene when visiting the church office so as not to further expose our staff.
- 3) If you are negatively affected by this crisis in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your elder and deacon, or a pastor. Pastors and elders can easily make themselves available for phone or video visits for those who are self-quarantined because of illness, risk, or travel.
- 4) As this is a constantly changing and fluid situation, please be aware that the advice and recommendations may change at short notice. Please check your email regularly.

May God, the rock of our salvation, bless us all in these coming weeks with wisdom, grace, and love.

In his peace,

The leadership of Community CRC