



# Church of the Brethren

3402 Plantation Road, NE, Roanoke, VA 24012



March 13, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Most people are talking about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its potential impact. More and more frequently we are hearing of colleges cancelling spring break trips and going to on-line only classes. Major sporting events are being cancelled, and travel plans are significantly impacted as the virus spreads around the world.

Already we have one congregation that has suspended services and activities due to the exposure of a member to the virus. We know of another congregation that is moving their service online. At this point we have made no decisions concerning the District Board Meeting scheduled for Saturday, March 21, or the Awakening Services scheduled to begin on March 29 at Cloverdale.

The time for containment of the virus is past. At this point it is prudent to slow the spread of the disease. This will prevent available medical facilities from becoming overburdened. The health care system can handle widespread sickness as long as the rate of infection does not rise too quickly

Most healthy adults will not be affected by the virus; those who are affected will experience typical flu-like symptoms. Some people might experience more severe symptoms which could include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Older adults and those with compromised immune systems are the persons most at risk.

At this point, **basic preventative measures** are still highly recommended:

1. Wash your hands with soap and hot water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
2. Avoid close contact (at least three feet away) with people who are sick.
3. Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes.
4. Avoid hand shaking and other forms of bodily contact.
5. Cover your mouth when sneezing with your arm, not just your hand. If you sneeze on your hand, immediately wash your hands.
6. If you are sick, stay at home and contact your primary care provider if you develop symptoms, have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19.

In terms of how all of this impacts our congregations, we want to proceed with caution and common sense. **In general, if your local school district cancels classes due to the threat or actual spread of the virus, this will be a signal to cease congregational gatherings until such time that classes resume.** In particular, if the threat or spread of the virus continues into Holy Week, we advise postponing love feast and communion until later in the spring. If this occurs, congregations could make the following changes:

1. Begin streaming worship services and Bible Studies online.
2. Post worship folders and bulletins online.
3. E-mail prayer concerns to the pastor or designated individual.
4. Offerings may be mailed, taken to the church or, if available, given online.

5. Encourage persons staying at home, whether out of caution or because of illness, to stay in touch with others by phone or internet.
6. Communicate any changes on your congregation's outdoor signage and social media presence such as websites, Facebook or other platforms.

Given the ongoing and seemingly unending news updates, **it is important to remain calm and to put our trust and faith in God.**

**A prayer for these days**  
God of the present moment,  
God who in Jesus stills the storm  
and soothes the frantic heart;  
bring hope and courage to all  
who wait or work in uncertainty.

Bring hope that you will make them the equal  
of whatever lies ahead.

Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided,  
for your will is health and wholeness;  
you are God, and we need you.

This we pray in Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer was shared in an e-mail from Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church. It comes from the website of the Episcopal Relief and Development Agency. Portions of the foregoing text were contributed or based upon work shared by Jeff Graffeo, Timothy P. Harvey, Russ Matteson, Robby Tatum and others.

Trusting in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David K. Shumate', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

David K. Shumate  
District Executive Minister

DKS

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