



First Presbyterian Church

65 North Third Street
Newark, OH 43055

Dear Friends in Christ,

I would like to talk with you about the Coronavirus (COVID-19). I want you to know that this disease is serious. I want you to know that all of us need to prepare for its arrival. I want you to know that the church is here to help you prepare. This virus is spreading around the world at an alarming rate. Every day new cases are popping up. There have been several confirmed cases of the virus in Ohio. Government officials are taking near-unprecedented steps to slow the spread of this illness. This afternoon the governor declared that all K-12 schools start a 3-week spring break Monday, he has banned all gatherings of people over 100 people; and public universities in Ohio have closed in-classroom education. The list of public safety measures that are being considered or enacted is ever expanding. We live in a small world that keeps getting smaller. The Coronavirus appears to be something that we are going to have to face in Newark Ohio.

FAQ

Symptoms: Fever, Tiredness, & Dry Cough. Some patients have aches, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea.

Severity: For most, symptoms are mild and begin gradually. Some never have symptoms. 80% of individuals recover without a need for special treatment. About 1 in 6 people with the illness become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing. **The severity is much greater for older individuals and those with respiratory problems.**

Spread: This disease spreads in a similar fashion to the flu. It is spread through small droplets of liquid that are expelled when someone sick with the virus breaths or coughs. These droplets can travel in the air and be inhaled by others. It appears to be able to transfer in the air about 6 feet. These droplets can also land on a surface and then transfer to another person when someone touches the surface and then touches their face. It is unknown how long the virus can survive on surfaces.

Incubation Period: The virus can be in your body up to 14 days before causing the illness.

Likelihood You Will Catch this Virus: At the moment, it is very unlikely you will catch the virus here in Newark. This situation can change very quickly. The World Health Organization updates the situation daily.

Should I be Worried: According to the World Health Organization, yes. However, you do not need to panic. The illness caused by this Coronavirus is generally mild, especially in children and young adults. Yet, 1 in every 5 people who catch the virus needs hospital care. The risk is greater for older persons and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes.)

*Information pulled from the World Health Organization Website on 3/12/20

Preparations and Precautions

I hope you can see the severity of the situation. That said there are preparations each of us can make. These preparations can slow the spread of the disease; they can reduce our chances of getting ill, they can help us from infecting others, and they can help us get through the next few months in a more comfortable way.

General Precautions

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
- Maintain at least a 6 foot distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- **Stay home if you feel unwell.** If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.
- Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 hotspots (cities or local areas where COVID-19 is spreading widely).
- If possible, avoid traveling to places – especially if you are an older person or have diabetes, heart or lung disease.
- Use a mask if you are sick or are particularly susceptible to illness.
- Seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Alert your doctor or health provider to your symptoms before you arrive.

You might consider using services in order to limit your interaction with others and exposure to illness. For example: You could order your groceries with curb side pickup or delivery. You can order most prescriptions through the mail. You can use online services for banking.

General Preparations

Basically, be prepared to spend a month in your home. Most sources do not give an exact amount of time you should prepare for. I say a month because the longest quarantine I have found has been 5 weeks. There are many very possible situations that could arise in the coming days, weeks or months that would necessitate a prolonged time of home isolation. The government could call for home quarantine. This has already happened in other parts of the world. You could become ill with a different disease like the flu. You could come in contact with someone who later develops COVID-19.

That would necessitate that you quarantine yourself for 14 days or longer. You could develop COVID-10 and need to stay home to treat the illness.

It is also possible that items you need will become less available. It is already very difficult to get items like medical masks and disinfectant wipes. In this case, you may not be quarantined to your house, but you would still need to make sure you have supplies on hand. It is also important that we do not hoard excessive amounts of items to the detriment of others. Most likely you will not need to go more than a month in your home. Even in the hardest hit areas of China and Italy, groceries and staples have remained available.

At this moment, it is safe for most of us to leave our homes and make preparations. It is important that we take this opportunity to do so.

Make sure you have a month worth of: food, medication, and water in your home.

Other items you might consider:

- Medication that you would want on hand in case you do get sick (Tylenol, Cold & Flu medicine, but also tissues, Gatorade, Chicken Soup, Sprite...)
- A First Aid Kit
- Extra Batteries
- Fun things to do for entertainment

The Church is Here

There are several things the church can do to help:

1. We can help you prepare if you are physically or financially unable to make preparations.

Please call the church office if you need physical or financial assistance preparing for the Coronavirus. We can work with you to get the items you need.

It is important that we help as soon as we can. The longer we wait, the more difficult it could be to get needed items or even to travel. So please do not delay in asking for assistance if needed.

2. We can help with social isolation.

As a church we are working on a 'phone tree' style system that will make sure that each of us is continually being checked in on.

We are investigating a way in which we can have some type of service available online for those who cannot make it to church. But also so we can continue worship, even if we are unable to meet physically for a period of time.

Each of us needs to be aware of social isolation. The CDC calls for 'social distancing'. They want us to keep our distance from each other physically, they want us avoid gatherings; they want us to stay home as much as possible. This makes it very important that we stay in contact with people in other ways. I urge each of us to make an effort to: send emails, make phone calls, write letters, and use the internet as ways to stay connected with others.

Church Plans

At this moment, it does not seem necessary to cancel any church event or service. I believe that this will probably change, if or when it does, we will send out that information via email and Facebook. Please call the church office and let us know if you need contacted by phone.

As I mentioned earlier, we are working on a 'Phone Tree' for keeping in contact and are working on a way to provide some kind of worship experience online.

I will be in contact with session regularly and we will try very hard to make decisions that are in the best interest of the church. We would never want someone to get this virus because they came to church.

Scripture

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" -Matthew 6:25-27

God cares for us and provides us with what we need. God loves us and sees us as truly valuable. He will be with us no matter what happens. Yet, I don't think that it precludes us from preparation. We can see in the parable of the bridesmaids that the bridesmaids that prepared by bringing extra oil were considered wise. Biblically, preparation and planning are seen as wise. Here, Jesus says that God cares for animals and fields and they make no preparation. He wasn't telling us not to prepare, but that God cares and provides. What we are called to avoid is worry. I would say that worry is concern without action. To be concerned that you might get sick but make no effort to keep yourself safe.

I pray that this virus goes away quickly and that it causes no more harm. I pray for each of your safety and I thank the Lord that he provides for us all.

Final Thoughts

Things are happening very fast with this illness. No one had even heard of this disease until late January and then this morning the governor closed all K-12 schools in Ohio for the next three weeks. I wrote this letter this morning and have already had to alter it. I had wanted to have several other people edit this letter, but I feel like it is more important to get the letter out.

I hope that each of you take this with the seriousness it deserves. Please stay home when you are sick, maintain good hygiene practices, prepare your house for a possible lengthy stay and let the church know as soon as possible if you would like assistance.

In Christ

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rev. Steven Brand", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev Steven Brand