

*Dear Church Family,*

I hope and pray that this letter finds you healthy in mind, body, and spirit! My heart is still overflowing with joy at how wonderfully the online streaming service came together on Sunday! It is hard to hit a home run on the first swing, but my goodness, our audio-visual folks pulled it off! I expect it will be even better this Sunday as we all make small changes based upon what we have learned. Praise be to God for bringing this technology to us when he did!

Last night Church Council met to discuss and decide upon how we, the Body of Christ at First Baptist Morehead City, might proceed with ministry and missions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following was unanimously agreed upon by the council.

**Effective immediately, all First Baptist gatherings of any size will be postponed until at least until March 30<sup>th</sup>.** At that time the Church Council will meet again, potentially via an online platform, to reevaluate current conditions and plan accordingly.

**An Ad-Hoc Care Team has been formed to assist in meeting the needs of those who may need to remain in isolation in the coming weeks.** This team is eager to help. We can run errands for you, shop for you, provide meals, and chat and pray with you over the phone. Let us know your needs and we will help.

If you—or anyone in your household—is considered high risk, we urge you to stay home. High risk categories include those who are immunosuppressed or suffering from other illnesses, persons with a history of lung disease, and those who are 60 or older. If this describes you or someone in your house, please stay home and let the rest of us run your errands and do your shopping for you. In fact, everyone who can stay home should consider doing so, as social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19.

If you need assistance, please contact Vonne Lewis, FBC Ministry Assistant at [vlewis@fbcmhmc.org](mailto:vlewis@fbcmhmc.org) or 726-4142; or your deacon who will coordinate with our staff and care team to handle any needs.

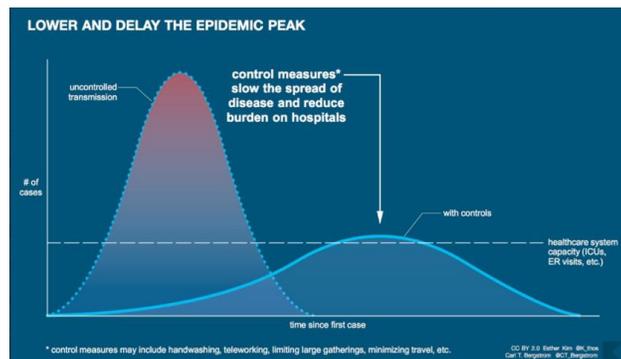
**Please consider continuing to give your tithes and offerings either online through our website, app, or by mail.** Please remain faithful as much as possible so we can offer help to others as needed during this time. Follow this link to access our online giving: <https://fbcmhmc.org/giving>

**Do all that you can to love your neighbors while not putting yourself or others at risk.** Pray for them. If you're healthy, reach out to them. Find out who among your neighbors is elderly or immunocompromised and see how you can help meet their needs.

#### **You may be wondering, "What is Our Rationale?"**

- We are at the front end of a pandemic. The total number of US cases is growing exponentially. Last Tuesday there were roughly 1,000 US cases; as of yesterday there were close to 4,500 confirmed cases. Due to limited testing capabilities, the actual number of infected may be much higher.
- COVID-19 is deadly. Death rates for the disease range between 0.4% and 15%, but the scholarly consensus is that approximately 1.5% of those who get it in the USA will die. (Thus, it is 10-20x more deadly than influenza.)

- Many in our congregation are at high risk. Those at greatest risk are the immunocompromised and persons over 60 years of age.
- ALL in our congregation are potential disease vectors. Whenever we gather together, we create an environment in which the disease can be transmitted. The current thinking is that every carrier transmits it to 1-3 persons on average. Even children, who thankfully do not seem to be badly affected by the illness, nevertheless become infected and are transmitters of it. And young children in particular aren't careful to follow sanitary guidelines, regardless of how careful their parents may be.
- Flattening the Curve = Loving your Neighbor. Time is of the essence. By slowing the spread of the illness, many lives will be saved even if the same number of people eventually get sick. How? UNC's Zeynep Tufekci argues that "everyone won't show up at the hospital all at once. Plus, if we can flatten that curve, there is more time to develop a vaccine or find antivirals that help." Thus, Tufekci urges those in a position of authority to figure out ways to help people stay at home, so as to minimize the spread of the disease. The most loving thing to do right now is to cancel everything, and then encourage healthy people to care for those who are most at risk.



This too shall pass. Current precautionary measures are temporary. Staying home for a few weeks won't hurt anyone in our congregation, as long as we keep communicating and sharing our needs with one another. We have grown accustomed to being flexible in recent years. We have endured and we have thrived! We will soon regather and return to our regular patterns of worship and ministry, giving thanks to the Lord for his protection.

In this particular case, our desire to "love our neighbor" well compels us to restrict our events. Yet, we know that we have to serve others. When the plagues of yesteryear threatened the safety of populations the church rose up to care for those in need. They lived lives that were exemplary for their neighbor. We pray you will do so as well. God has throughout history used trouble and hardship to grow his church both deep and wide. I believe he will do no less today! May we remain faithful, trusting in his divine providence. May we continue to love our neighbor as our self as much as we are able. May the peace of God fill our hearts until that time we are able to gather together again. In the meantime, tune in this Sunday at 11am via Facebook (and potentially You Tube) for our worship service.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Nate

*"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:8*