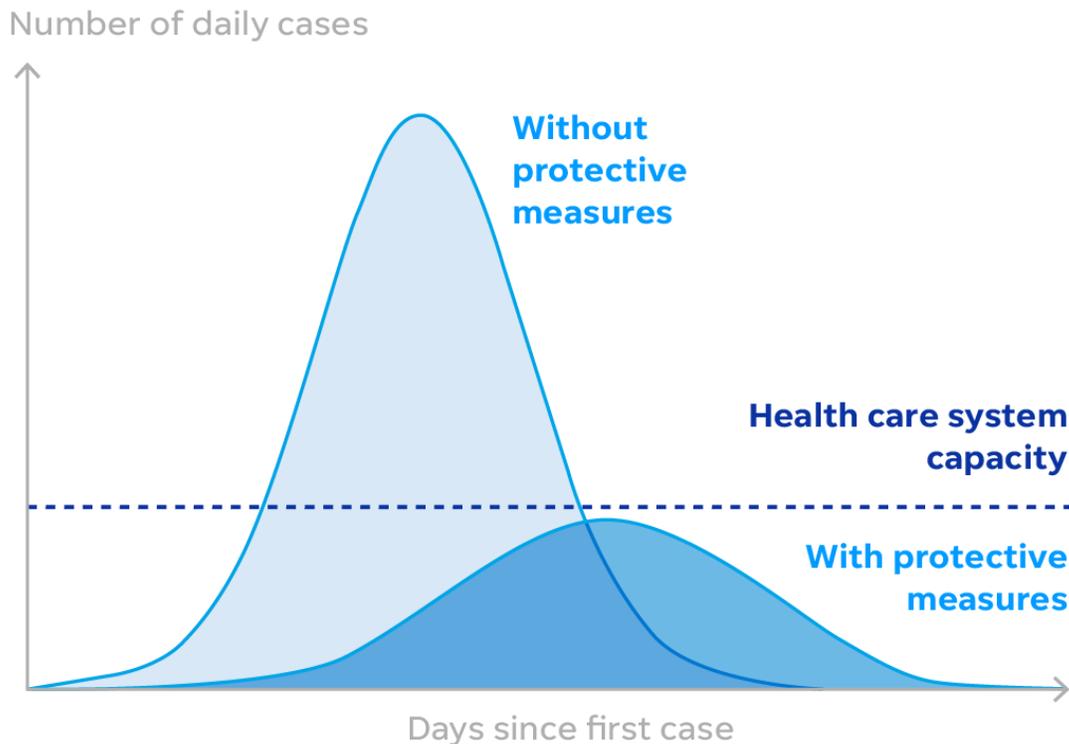


CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) AND ST. JOHN'S

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

A Message to the People of St. John's from Dennis W. Foust, Senior Minister



"The spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:7)

For the next few months, we will be church and do Church in unprecedented ways. This coronavirus disease pandemic requires us to respond to new opportunities of being actively faithful faithfully active as an intergenerational servant community.

By now, you have heard the phrase, *"Flattening the Curve."* This term rises out of epidemiology and refers to slowing the spread of a viral disease. I am trusting and praying that each of you is doing all you can to help 'flatten the curve' of impact. Our medical professionals and their families will appreciate our decisions and our discipline. Let us do everything we can to help our medical community help others. Every hour, it seems, we are learning more about the implications of Coronavirus Disease. It is now evident that we will continue to live as 'Scattered Church' for quite

some time into the future. What we thought might be a couple of weeks seems to have become a few months. Weddings are being rescheduled, teachers are using online approaches and calendars are being recalculated.

In this post, it is my desire to:

- (1) explain what your staff and leaders have been doing in the past week and what we plan to do in the short-term future we can see as of today; and
- (2) describe a few initiatives you can take to help us do church in strong and healthy ways and be Church in transformational ways during this challenging time.

WHAT YOUR CHURCH STAFF AND LEADERS HAVE BEEN DOING THIS PAST WEEK AND WHAT WE PLAN TO DO IN THE FUTURE – AS WE CAN SEE IT TODAY.

Last Tuesday, March 10th, we gathered in our beautiful sanctuary to celebrate the life and ministry of Judy Biber in a meaningful service. By the time we gathered in staff meeting the next morning, Governor Cooper had declared a state of emergency in North Carolina due to the health crisis. As we discussed whether to postpone Katherine Schwarzenegger-Pratt's visit, her people notified us that her entire book tour had been cancelled. By Thursday afternoon, it became clear that churches were needing to make decisions about Sunday. Since we are not Episcopalians or Methodists, we do not have a bishop to send down instructions making decisions for us. As Baptists, we get to make our own decisions. I called Jason Benton, our Deacon Chair and we polled the deacons who chair the three deacon panels. By the time the decision was made, it was too late to send out a notice until Friday.

Therefore, on Friday, we sent out the notice to the congregation and on Saturday, we celebrated the life of ministry of The Rev. Carolyn Hicks, hospice chaplain and St. John's member. We made the right decision and went about it in the right way for Baptists. On Saturday, I inserted videos of music from Kevin into some words and sent them to Mallory. She pieced together my notes and a good resource from Allison and sent it out to you. On Sunday, March 15th, we used the Household Worship Resource and the staff met by a Zoom video conference call to plan a variety of initiatives we began today.



Yesterday, several of us were in the offices and around the buildings to complete tasks, gather resources and coordinate roles. Our custodians began a deep cleaning and disinfecting of our facilities. Jacquelyn is figuring out what to do with our mail service, coordinating our custodians and communicating with others who use our buildings. Mallory is handling our digital media, providing pertinent information and determining creative ways to keep our congregation informed. Lee, Allison, Kevin and I are joining our pastoral deacons in calling through our membership, participant and guest lists. Allison is coordinating with our Weekday School staff and will be preparing videos of stories for children along with devotional resources to be used by families. Kevin is preparing several musical selections and will be providing some live musical moments on our St. John's Facebook page in future weeks as well as videos. Lee is coordinating several of our community ministries projects, assisting in checking on our most vulnerable households and staying in touch with our youth and their families.

It was a good day of ministry for me yesterday, as I gathered resources, communicated with two young couples who are having to change their wedding dates from April & May and spoke with Dan Biber and Phil Hicks, two grieving husbands of more than fifty years who buried wives last week. It was a blessing to encourage a person who is exploring new adventures in their calling to serve God, a person who is home from the hospital and several members and church leaders. It was also my opportunity to participate in a conference call from 3-4 pm with twelve leaders of Charlotte organizations serving homeless persons and the working poor. My day concluded by buying bologna and cheese so Lee Gray, Paula and I can make the 200 sandwiches for homeless men that some of our St. John's women usually make – however, they need to practice social distancing right now.

Tomorrow, I will continue coordination conversations with community and church leaders and identify ways to support Novant Presbyterian as their efforts intensify in the near future. In future weeks, I will offer encouragement through theological/scriptural reflections through a new effort called – 'Stories of Faith' – (with a touch of humor) using video, live-streaming and written media sources. Our staff will continue to offer Household Worship Resources each week and explore other creative options. Our church leaders will pursue further conversations to assure the health, vitality and impact of St. John's expresses strong witness in the weeks and months ahead. After tomorrow, I will be primarily working from our home, using phone, email and other

digital media to communicate and do virtual gathering with counseling sessions and meetings of groups.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP US DO CHURCH IN STRONG AND HEALTHY WAYS AND BE CHURCH IN TRANSFORMATIONAL WAYS DURING THIS CHALLENGE?

1. **LET'S STAY IN TOUCH:** In these kinds of situations, it is natural to feel detached, anxious and afraid. Social distancing is essential now; but, we must not allow social distancing to create loneliness. Our ministry staff and pastoral deacons are setting the example of calling each household – although we are leaving some voicemails – to assure our relational climate is strong. It is my hope that each Sunday School Growth Group will stay in touch with each person on your roll. If you need a Growth Group list, you can ask Mallory to send one to you.
2. **LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER AND BE PATIENT:** As you are forced to stay inside, you can minister to others in your family by remembering there is increased anxiety in you and them. Take time to play together (games, puzzles, walks, movies, cooking, etc.). It helps bridge awkward moments. Allow for time separate from one another and plan together time with purpose.
3. **IF YOU ARE YOUNGER AND WILLING TO DO GROCERY RUNS FOR OUR MEMBERS WHO ARE OVER 60 YEARS OF AGE,** please let one of the ministers know. As we call through the congregation, we are creating two lists – shoppers and payers. Jason Benton shopped for his grandmother Jean Hutson the other day. She told him her grocery list by phone. When he finished shopping, he called her to tell her the amount. She had a check waiting on the back porch where he left her groceries. She waved to him through the window. Some of our members do not have grandsons or grandmothers in the city. We can celebrate being an intergenerational servant church during this time.
4. **REMEMBER THOSE WHO CARRY SPECIAL BURDENS AND ANXIETIES:** Please call a church member, neighbor or family member who is vulnerable to this disease or who carries a heavy burden anyway – even without this pandemic. Notes, cards emails and calls are important.
5. **FEAR NOT AND BE NOT ANXIOUS:** Trusting in the Lord as your strength is more than a good Bible verse; it is a spiritual truth. You find your strength in your relationship with God who is your faithful provider. You need not fear of allow anxiety to consume you.

6. **PLEASE REMEMBER TO SUPPORT ST. JOHN'S FINANCIALLY:** During these



months, our missional ministries will continue to need support. Staff salaries still need to be paid. Utility bills will still need to be paid. Along the way, as we become aware of unique opportunities or needs, we want the church's finances to be strong enough so we can respond. Your gifts to the Annual Financial Ministry Plan Budget of St.

John's supports 42 different ministries – each one is making a difference during this crisis. You may mail your financial gifts to: St. John's Baptist Church, Attn. Jacquelyn McAbee, 300 Hawthorne Lane, Charlotte, NC 28204. Thank you.

7. **PRAY FOR THOSE MOST VULNERABLE AND PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL**

WORKERS: We are blessed to have several medical professionals in St. John's. Please encourage and comfort them as you pray for them and their families in the months ahead.

8. **REPORT ANY NEEDS YOU HEAR ABOUT AMONG OUR PEOPLE TO ONE OF**

THE MINISTERS: We would rather hear about someone's need 100 times than not at all. Although we cannot go visit hospitals or nursing homes, your ministers can still respond to each need once we know. Each of us has changed our voice mails on the office phones to include our cell numbers. But, to help you a bit more, here is the list: Dennis Foust – 704.359.7234; Lee Gray – 704.451.1309; Allison Benfield – 828.448.8412; Kevin Gray – 803.524.0287.

9. **STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE ST JOHN'S FACEBOOK PAGE AND WATCH YOUR EMAIL FOR UPDATES AND MESSAGES:**

We will be communicating with you regularly. Please help us stay in touch with one another. As we live through this unique time, let's create stories of how we became stronger as a faith community in learning the meaning of being Church.

10. **ASK GOD TO GUIDE YOU:** In times like these, God can guide you into a closer relationship with God's Self, a deeper understanding of the Way of Jesus and a more meaningful spiritual life. Yet, this doesn't just happen because you simplify and slow down.

This pandemic is more than the flu. It is a killer virus that we must avoid in every way possible. St. John's is choosing to be on the safe rather than the sorry side of this pandemic. We will continue to minister and serve wherever possible as we flatten the curve. Let us alleviate anxieties, encourage one another and provide supportive ministry. Once again, thank you for your patience, trust and commitment.