



Dear Hope,

The leadership of Hope would like to address the global - and now local - public health concern known as “the coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19). We would like to address COVID-19 in two ways: practically and pastorally.

### ***1/ Practical Issues***

Hope Presbyterian Church is a public gathering. Therefore we love our neighbor by slowing the spread of COVID-19. Certainly the media coverage and social media buzz can result in hysteria that is blown out of proportion. At the same time, this is a legitimate major public health concern. Unlike the common flu, this virus is new, and there's still a good deal to learn about it - precisely how it spreads, how contagious it is, how often disease is severe, and what the actual mortality rate is. The virus continues to spread in the U.S., and it's likely we'll have cases in our own neighborhoods before long.

Love of neighbor demands that we are proactive, and not reactive. That we are *leaders* in blessing our community. Therefore we are implementing the following practices in the following weeks to reduce the risks of virus transmission during our worship services and gatherings.

*a/ Public worship.* We have just learned that the Metro School is cancelling all classes and events until 3/27. This also means that we will not have access to the building for Sunday worship. We were anticipating this, and have made the following changes for Sunday worship for at least the next two weeks:

- 1/ We are a church of home groups - and so we will be utilizing our home group infrastructure for Sunday worship. We will simultaneously gather in our pre-existing home groups on Sunday at 10am.
- 2/ If we anticipate these gatherings will exceed ~25 people, they will divide to accommodate.
- 3/ Worship in each gathering will be led by leaders of the church, and a sermon from Pastor Joe will be live-streamed on our website starting at 10:35am.
- 4/ Home group gatherings will not include HopeKids classes or nursery care - so they will have all the life and texture of the 1st century church!
- 5/ For all who are not in a home group - members will be making *personal* invitations, in addition to the general invitation and meeting place information on our website.
- 6/ Tithes and offerings will be handled by our online and text options, so that home group leaders are not handling cash and checks.

*b/ Stay home if you are sick.* This is absolutely vital - and in close calls (we've all been there!) play it safe.

c/ *No shame*. If you are at higher risk for severe disease (older adults and anyone with underlying medical problems - heart disease, lung disease, immune compromise) do *not* feel shame if you choose to stay home for a few weeks. We will be live-streaming and posting sermons.

d/ *Hand Gel*. We will increase access to hand gel (at least 60% alcohol) or ensure appropriate hand washing during our home group gatherings.

e/ *Cleaning*. We are using Lysol (or similar EPA-registered household disinfectants) to clean high-touch surfaces before and after our home group gatherings.

These measures are not coming from a place of panic. Rather, a place of loving concern for our neighbor - especially the most vulnerable. Hospitals are already at capacity, so slowing outbreak and preventing a wave of cases in a short time frame will create (literal) space and care for those who need it most at our hospitals.

## **2/ Pastoral Issues**

So wash your hands! But what about our minds and hearts? How does Jesus change the way we read our newsfeed and go about our life in these anxious days? We would like to remind you of three things:

a/ *God is in control*. Peter says: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). We would encourage you to think about the mighty hand of God every time you scroll down your news feed; as you try to line up child-care for school closures; as you lose money in the markets; or as you have to cancel anticipated vacations or business travel. God is in control.

b/ *Humans are vulnerable*. Moses prays: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Events like this remind us how vulnerable we are. This is *always* true - in plenty and want. But we Americans are excellent at pretending otherwise. Let's allow this to awaken our dependency on God, and trust in his ultimate promises to make all things new. Allow this to open your eyes to friends and colleagues who may be more receptive to the good news of Jesus.

c/ *We are on God's mission*. The people of Jesus do not press pause in times like this. We do not retreat. God sends us on mission to the world! This means we consider the common good not just of our church family, but our neighborhood. This means we must move from a posture of casual apathy to a posture of sober concern and service. Historically Christians have drawn on God's sovereignty, their eternal security, and God's mission to the world in moments like this! They don't get self-absorbed and protectionist, but serve their vulnerable neighbors. The earliest Christians during the plagues were the *only* ones serving the sick, and even today we are hearing stories of the underground church in China serving others with boldness. We have a great opportunity to bless our neighbors during the next few months. Be safe ("The prudent see danger and take refuge" Proverbs 22:3) *but also* carry hope of Jesus into this anxious and hurting world.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out. We too will be in touch,

In Christ,  
The leadership of Hope Presbyterian Church

***Receive updates at our website: [www.hopechurchcolumbus.org](http://www.hopechurchcolumbus.org)***