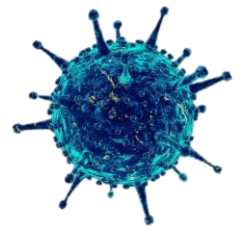


Covid-19: Acting Faithfully and Responsibly

Update 2: Cancellation of services – 17th March 2020



These notes are one of a series, designed to offer some help as you think through your role as Church Leaders. They are not intended and should not be used in place of relevant Government advice – they seek to respond to the latest information at the date shown above. If subsequent advice has been issued by Government, BUGB or NWBA, please be guided by that.

Following the announcement that non-essential gatherings are discouraged, many church leaders are uncertain about whether services should go ahead. Is a church service “essential” or “non-essential”, is “discouraged” the same as “banned”?

Following further clarification from relevant authorities, the Baptist Union advises that church services should not take place for at least the next few weeks. This means that you need to take action to respond and in doing so, we would offer the following advice.

Act Intentionally

Although the recommendation has been offered nationally, it would be helpful for you to still engage with this decision as a church. This is not just a matter of closing things down but proactively thinking about how you can keep people’s faith and discipleship nourished and ensure their wellbeing while your church is not meeting. Try to “own” this decision, not just receive it.

Think Positively

Many Christian leaders often speak of the value of retreat and isolation as a beneficial spiritual discipline. There are great examples in Scripture like Elijah’s experience in a desert cave (1 Kings 19:11ff) or John on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9-11) where people had a profound experience of the presence of God in a situation of solitude. This is a time to think about how we can encourage members of our church and the wider community, using the experience of retreat ministries to help them find spiritual wellbeing amidst this crisis. Once the immediate technical matters are resolved, we will work as an NWBA team to offer resources to support you in this area.

Use Technology

This is a time for us to think about how we can make better use of technology to stay in touch with one another and reach out to others in isolation. If you don’t feel able to, there will be others in your church or wider community who might have experience of using social media, video conferencing, vlogging, blogging etc. that you can harness. We are exploring whether we can offer some advice to those seeking to use new technologies that they are not familiar with. We are also working on some online resources that you can use in maintaining a sense of community and fellowship during this time.

Be prayerful

While people may not be able to gather to pray together, people can pray at pre-notified set-times and around specific themes – think about how you can facilitate that. You may also want to explore ways that people can share what they sense God has been saying to them in their prayer times. While we want to be prayerful about the current Covid-19 situation, perhaps we can also make sure that others in situations of need and struggle are not overlooked or forgotten.

Please be prayerful, thoughtful and responsible and keep up to date with information from the health authorities and our Baptist Union.