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Dear Church Family,

As I mentioned in my previous letter only a short five days ago, “this situation is extremely fluid, we are continuing to monitor new developments, reevaluating our steps and actions, and will be following recommendations that come from official channels, which can help prevent the spread of infection.” New recommendations now prompt this update.

The President of the United States is now “recommending that all Americans avoid gathering in groups of more than ten people.” After consultation with church leadership, it is the unanimous conclusion that we will suspend all gatherings at Mt. Zion for a minimum of two weeks. If more time is needed, we will decide based on the information available at that time. This decision is the result of prayerful consideration of both the President’s recommendation and additional information that has been gathered.

In making this decision, I am mindful that this will only be the third time since 1844 that Mt.Zion has suspended regular meetings for more than a Sunday or two. The cause of the first suspension was the Civil War. The second was the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918. Now, in 2020, it is the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Given the impact of this decision, I want you to know some of the factors that went into deciding to suspend regular meetings for only the third time in our history.

1. The President and other authorities are recommending it. In Romans 13:1-7, God commands His people “to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” While it can be argued that the President is only “recommending” and is not implementing a ban against meeting in groups larger than ten, his intent is clear. He has stated that, “if everyone makes this change or these critical changes and sacrifices now, we will rally together as one nation and we will defeat the virus.”

Although there may be times in the future when we will need to make a decision to “obey God rather than men,” this is not one of those times. Christians are not being singled out for their faith and being compelled by the government to disobey God. This is a nationwide health concern which applies equally to all Americans. Missing church out of a sincere concern for the health and safety of yourself and others is not sinful, as God sees both the action and the heart. (Jer. 17:10).

2. We are called to love our neighbor. In Leviticus 13, the method of preventing the spread of leprosy was to isolate. If an infection was suspected, it was an expression of love and care for others to take the precaution of spending time in isolation away from others.

Each of us is admonished to “look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Php 2:4). Health authorities have made it clear that exposure can not only make you sick, but make you a potential carrier to others. Exposure may only cause minimal, if any symptoms for you, but it may be devastating or even deadly to someone vulnerable who is then exposed through you.

3. There is currently no vaccine or therapeutic cure for COVID-19. The current strategy for dealing with this pandemic is to limit exposure. Just as a fire will not spread without fuel, the virus will not spread if it does not continue to find new hosts.

These new circumstances have forced us to consider what we must stop doing. Now that this decision has been made, the focus will be on what we must start doing. Our mission remains the same: to work together in fulfilling the Great Commission. We must persevere, help each other, and continue to be faithful in reaching out with the love of Christ in word and action. More information will be coming on how we will be doing that.

As in my last letter, I continue to urge prayer for our leaders, for one another and for those yet without Christ.

I close with a reminder that the Great Commission is followed by the Great Promise:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.** Amen.

Your pastor,

Jon Denney