



REV. DR CLIFF FLETCHER

BISHOP, THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA

March 17, 2020

My dear FMCIC family,

I am sure that you are paying attention to all the closures, and recommendations that are being issued by our three levels of government and health departments. Today in Ontario, Mr. Ford has declared a state of emergency. **Because of the most recent information that we have received, we are recommending that all of our churches suspend Sunday morning services for the next 3 weeks, beginning this Sunday.** This will coincide with March break travels and national self-isolation protocols.

It is unusual times, but an opportunity for your local church to shine (Philippians 2:15). What does it mean to take responsibility for your community in this season? I have heard from one of our churches that sent out flyers offering to help with shopping or even providing food for those who can't or shouldn't leave their homes. I was thrilled to read a call to prayer issued to the Church in Canada this Friday night – please pray with us from your homes.

- We have a responsibility to minister to the most vulnerable – this means providing safe non-gathering spaces!
- You will certainly meet members or adherents who will spiritualize this closure. They have said to our pastors already things like, “God will protect us from the virus if we are worshipping together”. This is poor theology. The truth is, we are missionaries in a culture that is fearful, angry, bored and restless at home. I am sad when I read parents on the news saying that they are dreading alone time with their kids, or adults who describe being lost without sports. Can we help?
- Zoom, Skype, Messenger is still a legitimate way for you to conduct visitations – in fact, perhaps you will consider having you and your leadership team (staff, leaders, pastors, board) each commit to weekly cyber-visits with everyone in your church family. Confront isolation with internet (or phone) visits – be sure to pray with everyone you connect with;
- How else can we nurture church family in this season? Perhaps an online book club for all ages (recommend a book and facilitate a discussion), online classes for children and youth each day (and do things to help parents by coaching children and youth how to cook the family meal that day, make playdough, murder mystery, introduce them to prayer and other spiritual disciplines), write an old fashion letter or notes to anyone God brings to mind, or what about a support group or idea group for parents! I'd love to hear your sanctified ideas:
- If you do not yet have electronic giving, then there's never been a better time. Contact the Ministry Center or Sandy Crozier, to help you. Have a frank conversation with the non-electronic givers about how you can help them continue to tithe during this time (i.e. offering to pick up envelopes).

This is a very difficult time for our world. We are Jesus' solution to the fear, anger, isolation, boredom, and greed that seems to be the current environment. I commit to be in consistent communication with you as we prayerfully process this season and next... By Friday this week I will let you know about General Conference plans.

Sincerely,

Bishop Cliff Fletcher