

To my Church family,

When I started thinking about what to give up for Lent, it never crossed my mind that I'd be asked to give up one of the most meaningful things in my life – the corporate gathering of my Church family. But as elders, we feel that is one thing that Christ is asking us to give up in effort to love our neighbor well, look out for the vulnerable among us, and seek the shalom of our community during this time of health crisis.

For a loving and caring church family such as Grace Church, this will be a difficult time for many of us. We've learned together that the corporate gathering of the Church is more than just a religious expectation. It is a source of genuine Spirit-life and grace to us. It is something we have come to depend on as part of our week-in and week-out experience and enjoyment of Christ Himself. And not to mention, Grace Church simply feels like family. So to be isolated from ones we love and have become accustomed to sharing life with each week, to miss out on Joe Worrel's Sunday School lessons, Freddy's beaming smile, Bobby's warm hug, or the funny stories from the week shared over coffee in the gym will be painful and might be at times sad and lonely. That to say, these decisions are sobering ones that we don't take lightly.

So here's the short of it: as of now, (1) Grace Church has officially suspended all in-person gatherings of more than 10 people. This includes worship services, small groups, committee meetings, youth events, etc. But (2), we feel the need to be the Church now more than ever. If anything, we want to increase our connectivity, not lessen it right now.

How will that happen? Well, much of that will depend on all of us doing our part to check in and stay in touch with each other. Phone calls, letters, text messages, video chats (dare we say games of *Cooked* on Xbox Live) all become very meaningful now in ministering to one another as a Church family. If you need a good example of what this might look like, give Sandy Weaver a call and have her tell you how the women's Bible study is keeping up with one another these days. But it also means us as a staff and tech committee beefing up our online capabilities as a Church. So starting this week, our worship service will be streaming live from our website at the normal time of 9AM. We're also putting into place ways to have virtual small groups, online committee meetings, conference prayer gatherings, teen group interaction, etc. More information will be given in the days ahead as those things are solidified and come online.

In other words, the exhortation from the writer of Hebrews still applies to us:

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (10:23-25)*

We just have to work a little harder now to "meet" together and stir up one another.

So all hands on deck! It's time to be the Church for one another. And for sure, it is time to be the Church for our neighborhood. We'll talk more about all of this during our service on Sunday. And in the meantime, be assured that my heart is with you in love and prayerful concern! As always, PLEASE don't hesitate to contact me, one of the other staff members, or your elder or deacon if there are more specific ways we might pray for or assist you or anyone you know during this time.

Grace and Peace!  
(Pastor) Aaron