

IMPORTANT FELLOWSHIP FROM THE NORTH AMERICA CO-WORKERS

(PLEASE READ AND POST)

March 21, 2020

Dear responsible brothers of the North America churches,

We are in the midst of a serious global pandemic, commonly known as COVID-19, caused by a novel coronavirus. We must respond to this challenge in a way that best cooperates with the Lord to protect the saints and the churches.

We desire that we will not be found lacking in a proper, sober awareness of the seriousness of our situation, and thus fall short in preparedness and protective measures. Because the potential impact of the pandemic appears to be unmatched in the last 100 years, we are prone to underestimate the seriousness of what could lie ahead.

Factors that may contribute to a failure to estimate the seriousness of the pandemic:

- 1) COVID-19 is much more contagious than influenza, and can be silently passed on by persons who are actually infected with incubating virus, but who still feel well.
- 2) Once symptoms develop, in up to 80% of cases the symptoms are mild; many persons with mild symptoms are not seen by health care providers and are not tested; they may not be “slowed down” significantly by their symptoms and consequently may continuously spread the virus.
- 3) Access to testing for the virus remains very limited, and when available, it has typically not been ordered in mild cases, leading to under-reporting; where testing is not performed, even though the virus is actually circulating in the community, no cases are reported.
- 4) While symptoms of the infection are often mild, approximately 20% of cases are serious enough to require hospitalization. Furthermore, the mortality rate in the USA, based on the number of confirmed cases, ranges from 15 to 30 times higher than infection with the influenza virus.
- 5) Without broad-based cooperation with efforts to contain the virus, it is anticipated that our nation’s hospital and intensive care unit capacity will be overwhelmed.
- 6) Persons age 65 and older are at particularly high risk of serious complications if they are infected with the virus, especially if they have chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, kidney disease, malignancy, or are taking immunosuppressive medications.
- 7) Young to middle-aged persons are not exempt from risk of serious complications; 20% of patients hospitalized in the USA thus far are in the 20-44 age range.
- 8) While the symptoms experienced by children and young people may be milder, they are likely to contribute heavily to community spread.
- 9) It is not prudent to think that Americans, regardless of where they live, are in any way less susceptible to infection with COVID-19 than were residents of the nations that have been heavily affected thus far. While initially cases are concentrated in heavily travelled urban centers, with unrestricted domestic travel in the USA, all states and areas are likely to have cases, followed by wide community spread.

Experts urge that all Americans pay careful attention to three particular matters:

- 1) Social distancing: the virus is spread from person-to-person by direct touch, by contaminated surfaces, and especially by inhalation of virus-containing droplets suspended in the air when a person with infection coughs, sneezes, or talks. The likelihood of infection is much less when a distance of six feet is maintained between persons.

- 2) Remain at home: Only severe restriction of community contact can potentially limit the spread of the COVID-19 infection. The presidential coronavirus guidelines issued on March 16 were in this principle, nationally limiting gatherings to fewer than 10 persons and asking older persons to remain at home. In California, no non-essential public gatherings are permitted. Thus far, several states require their residents to remain at home, and 25% of the US population is currently under this mandate. It is likely that other states will follow, and some authorities advocate such restrictions nationwide.
- 3) Avoid all nonessential travel.

Attention to these matters not only protects the Lord's interests as it relates to the health and survival of the saints; it is also our needful responsibility and contribution toward the containment and eventual control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We implore that as much as possible, and until the pandemic is controlled in the USA, the responsible brothers serving the North America churches would endeavor to:

- 1) Themselves pay particular attention to the matter of remaining at home. Not only are many of them at high risk based upon their age and health status, but in the United States the mortality rate in men is 1.5-2 times higher than for women. Clearly, our older responsible brothers face a high profile of risk.
- 2) Fellowship locally and beyond as to the best way to urge the saints to comply with the above principles, and with all guidance provided by our governmental and public health agencies.
- 3) Encourage all saints to remain at home as much as possible and to practice social distancing when outside their homes; particularly, those who are over age 65 and/or have chronic health conditions should remain at home.
- 4) Provide or arrange for any needed technical assistance needed for the saints to be able to continue their meetings remotely. We recommend that all gatherings, large and small, be conducted via teleconference, with each saint participating from their own home.
- 5) Encourage the saints to practice handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, and frequent disinfecting of often-touched surfaces, as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control on their website, cdc.gov.
- 6) Educate our young people regarding social distancing, its importance, and the need for them to endeavor to practice it.
- 7) Urge grandparents to protect themselves by not only remaining at home but also limiting physical contact with their grandchildren.
- 8) Reassure the saints that the Lord is caring for His recovery, the saints, and the churches; urge them to give themselves to prayer that the Lord would use the present circumstances to further His move on the earth.

The full participation of all the saints is needed, along with that of all residents of America, to deter the present likelihood that the number of cases of COVID-19 in the United States will soon surpass the number reported by Italy and by China, making the USA the most heavily affected among all the nations.

May the Lord grant us the wisdom, perseverance, and mutual care needed to protect the saints and to contain, as much as possible, and as early as possible, the COVID-19 pandemic.

The North America Coworkers (in consultation with physician brothers)