



## Dear People of St John's and Holy Trinity Thornhill

We are in a new normal in “doing church”. And we have the Covid 19 virus to thank for this drastic plan of action. As Believers each one of us can play a vital and strategic role during times of national crisis. We can do that by actively adhering to government directives and proactively defending our families and communities, while not losing sight of Jesus’s directives to love one’s neighbours and to make disciples. How we ‘do church’ might temporarily change, but we remain a worshipping community, called to be salt and light, in all seasons.

Primarily, in this season of heightened fear, we are called to approach this challenge with calmness and a peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7), which comes from God. May the way that we face and tackle this challenge be God-honouring and reflective of a people who serve an all-powerful God.

The bishop has issued a directive **that this Sunday, 22 March** will be the last time we can gather in a large group to Break Bread. We are deeply cognisant of the inconvenience this may cause, and therefore thank you for your understanding and solidarity during this crucial period. This decision has come with much grappling and prayer as to a way forward (Ps 121).

This Sunday, at the 7.30am, 9.30 am and 6pm services, we need to be cognisant of the following:

1. We cannot legally allow more than 100 people to congregate on our campus at any one time. Therefore, if you have any underlying medical condition, fit into a demographic that is older than 65, or are exhibiting cold or flu symptoms, we ask that you refrain from coming to Church for either of those services.
2. We also need to make sure that the hand sanitiser is used as we enter the buildings and that we keep our social distance of more than a metre from each other.
3. Passing of the peace will be done by a Holy Wave.
4. The Collection Plate will be put in a central position to prevent it having to pass from hand to hand. We also encourage parishioners to receive Communion standing and not to kneel and make contact with the Altar Rail.
5. We are also only permitted to use Communion of One Kind – being the bread. The celebrant will be the only person consuming the wine.
6. There will be no breakfast or tea service after the services.



From **Monday, 23 March** the church will effectively be on lockdown until further notice, as per the Bishop's advice. This means that there will be no church services as we know them for the foreseeable future including our inspirational Holy Week and Easter Services.

All non-urgent meetings or outside organisations meeting on our premises have also been called off. This is drastic but we have to stop the spread of this virus – especially in a country which is already thinly stretched in terms of its health and medical resources.

The premise for this is that as Shepherds we need to protect the most vulnerable in our community, the aged; those with underlying medical conditions; those who live in small houses, shacks or old age institutions; and those who do not have access to First World medical treatment.

The ministry staff will continue to be available at St John's during working hours. Please text or use other social media to contact us. You do need to make an appointment if you are planning a visit.

Part of our plans to reach out to our parishioners at this time include:

1. Be Connected Ambassadors and Cell Group leaders to be in regular contact with those they "shepherd".
2. Weekly Sermons, including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, will be put on the St John's website at [www.stjohnswalmer.org.za](http://www.stjohnswalmer.org.za)
3. Other spiritual material will also be posted from time to time and sent via our St John's email service or via our website.
4. A prayer vigil will be held in the St Francis Chapel at various times.
5. If you are in crisis, need prayer, can't fetch your medicines, have run out of groceries etc please contact us via WhatsApp or Text or email message.

There will obviously need to be limits on certain ministries:

1. There will be no Youth Groups or Junior Church during this time.
2. There will be no baptisms (unless in an emergency) or confirmations during this period.
3. Funerals will be restricted to immediate family and friends.
4. All Fundraising or Other events have been postponed.

In these times may I borrow some ideas from evangelist and Canon J John.

#1 Display *sanity*. Let us listen to sensible advice from people who know what they are talking about – preferably qualified medical experts. It's also a time for theological sanity; after all, the Bible is full of



references of the need to seek wisdom. We need to remember that what we face is no worse than what most previous generations took for granted in those epidemics of flu, cholera, plague and the like that arise in history. It's important to remember that ultimately, we have received our orders from Christ: we are to be his faithful followers, we are to love God and our neighbour and, in all we do, to show faith, hope and love. Let's show sanity!

#2 I suggest we should display *stability*. We should be those who continue to do our duty. Whatever you are called to do, whether it be at home, work or church, continue to do it. Inspired by the truth of the Bible let us stand firm. Paul commands it (1 Cor 16:13, Eph 6:13, Phil 4:1 and 2 Thess 2:15 for example). It's a good command. We who have put our faith in Christ the rock have an important role to play in these dark and troubled days. We should be those who stand firm amid a chaotic sea of fearfulness. Let's show stability.

#3 Finally – and to be honest this is the *big* challenge – I would hope that we seek to display *serenity*. Serenity is the state of being calm and peaceful, especially in the face of problems and crises. It is the peace that is one of the great blessings frequently promised in the New Testament. It is offered freely to all who trust in Christ. In Philippians 4:7 Paul makes a wonderful promise: '*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*' May we all claim that promise of serenity, live it and share it.

What are we supposed to do? The answer is that we need to continue to live as children of God, putting our trust and hope in Jesus Christ and, in the power of the Spirit, seeking to prayerfully show sanity, stability and serenity in all that we live, say and do. And in doing so may we, in the very deepest shadows, shine brightly for Christ.

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