



FROM THE
DESK OF
THE BISHOP

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SOCIAL DISTANCING NOT SPIRITUAL DISTANCING

In recent days, we have been wisely encouraged by medical professionals to practice social distancing to help avoid the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. In a time of mandated “social distancing” religious congregations are grappling with how to keep people apart and yet still be connected to the spiritual support of their faith community. I pen these thoughts with the intention of easing the tension between being cautious and being faithful. *Social distancing, quarantine and isolation are used to contain the coronavirus pandemic and limit its impact on public health.*

Typical Reactions

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. People may feel anxiety, worry, or fear related to:

- Their own health status
- The health status of others whom you may have exposed to the disease
- The resentment that your friends and family may feel if they need to go into quarantine as a result of contact with you
- The experience of monitoring yourself, or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of the disease
- Time taken off from work and the potential loss of income and job security
- The challenges of securing things you need, such as groceries and personal care items
- Concern about being able to effectively care for children or others in your care
- Uncertainty or frustration about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future
- Loneliness associated with feeling cut off from the world and from loved ones
- Anger if you think you were exposed to the disease because of others’ negligence

- Boredom and frustration because you may not be able to work or engage in regular day-to-day activities
- Uncertainty or ambivalence about the situation
- A desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Symptoms of depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite, or sleeping too little or too much

The highlighted reactions clearly indicate the importance of spiritual connectedness and counseling during this period.

Adjust and Adapt

The present restrictions and requirements are strange and discomforting to most of us. It is a period that demands we learn to adapt and adjust. Without learning to adapt and adjust we would be extremely frustrated and unhappy. If we do not learn to adapt and adjust, we will crack and break under the pressures of life. Adapting and adjusting requires trusting God, humility, and commitment to making ourselves happy despite your situation and circumstance.

Adapting and adjusting is a choice. We choose to adapt and adjust and live peacefully or we can choose to not adapt and adjust and be miserable. In life, situations or circumstances happen that necessitates that we change. Change means adapting and adjusting to a new way of living. A new way of being. A new way of thinking.

Change in Congregational Gathering

In most evangelical setting, weekend congregational services are customary. If weekend worship services are no longer possible, we must become creative and change the strategy while we maintain the Mission of the church.

Creative Ways/Wise Counsel

To combat spiritual distancing and enhance spiritual connectedness, the following should be undertaken.

Communicate: Let your church family know what you are doing as a church in response to the crisis and let them know how they can help.

Cancellation: Leaders must be willing to adapt the ministry schedule. We must be ready and willing to postpone or cancel special events and replace with relevant ones.

Communication Links: We must make use of technology. Today, there are various avenues today through which we can continue our services – Live stream; Facebook Live; Zoom; etc. Zonal district executive officer can be contacted for assistance. Be careful in communicating to members what is available.

- Attempts are being made as I write, to keep NETD Website constantly update with relevant information on the coronavirus issue in Trinidad & Tobago and throughout our Island Districts. In addition, workers are asked to submit inspiration messages, pertinent info that can be uploaded on the site.

Constant Prayer: During a time of crisis, prayer should always increase (Acts 12:5).

- PAWITAT has designated March 22nd -29th as a week of prayer and fasting.
- Our Prayer Director, Rev. McClatchie will be contacting you with the details. As a District, as a local Assembly, as an individual we will continue our prayer vigil even when the suggested week has passed. Prayer brings peace to our hearts when we become fearful (Philippians 4:6-7).

Connected: It is imperative that we develop methods to remain connected in fellowship with and among the flock. Some have purchased a smartphone and placed all members numbers to conduct devotionals and sent WhatsApp messages where necessary. The local church is "one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

Cash flow: Income within the church will be negatively impacted. In addition, leaders should put mechanisms in place to receive tithes and offerings. Suggested options: give members church account numbers. Contact your church office to ascertain other measures that are available.

Collaborative Ministry: It is quite evident that some local assemblies are better equipped in human and other pertinent resources. Some may be able to assist while others may need assistance. In each instance, please contact the District office and indicate the kind of resources that can be made available or is needed. A task force will be put together to develop a comprehensive approach for the District. Please communicate to us relevant information so that informed decisions can be made.

"It Came to Pass not to Stay"

The phrase "And it came to pass." is found in the King James Bible an incredible 396 times! This phrase is even better when someone adds a twist to it. "The Bible said, 'And It Came to Pass'. It didn't say 'And It Came to Stay'." To my mind, this thought speaks directly into our present scenario. This idea of "It Came to Pass, not to Stay" is a great way to deal with what we might call our "troubles". It was never meant to stay in our experience. It came to pass so that we may learn something. It came to pass so that we may expand and grow. It came to pass so that we could become aware of our beliefs and change them. It came to pass because God watches over His Word to perform it.

Whenever we go through difficult times, we can take this new attitude toward it. 'It came to pass, not to stay.' Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. – 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. *Oh! What glorious opportunities to make the invisible God known!*

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." (Romans 12:12)