

March 27, 2020

Dear Northwood Family,

The longer things go on the more it is becoming apparent that social distancing and isolation will be our new normal for “flattening the curve” of the coronavirus’ spread.

I know for some of you that COVID-19 has actually meant greater responsibilities, greater challenges, and greater claims on your time and energy as you have to figure out how to lead others in responding to this pandemic. However for many of you COVID-19 has actually given you more margin as so many of your normal routines, obligations, and responsibilities have been put on pause. During this time, I want to urge you to take advantage of whatever time God has given you to rest and reflect rather than seek ways to fill your schedule with busyness again.

Use this time to rest physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. If the Lord has blessed you with extra time, use this time to read the Bible, meditate on it, and memorize it. Consider looking over [the prayers of Paul](#) or [the Lord’s Prayer](#), put them in your own words, and pray them for our church body. Use this time to reflect on God, your life, your community, and our church. As greater restrictions are placed on us, what is it that you miss most about gathering with your church family? What are you realizing you’ve taken for granted? Allow these reflections to stir up your longing to gather with God’s people in worship once again and to thank God for the many gifts he has given you in the past.

While I want to urge you to rest, reflect, and resist the urge to fill up our lives during this time, we also cannot forget that God created us as relational beings. The very first “not good” of creation was God’s statement “it is *not good* that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). With that in mind we want to provide you with a few weekly opportunities to digitally connect with your brothers and sisters in Christ around the Word and in prayer.

Home Worship Guide

While our [Home Worship Guide](#) is not designed to connect you to others at Northwood, it is designed to enable us to be shaped together in worship as we sing the same songs, pray for the same requests, read the same Scripture, and listen to the same Scripture preached. We realized that it may have not been completely clear last week, but our home worship guide is designed to be interactive and we hope it will continue to bless you. Additionally, one piece of feedback we received was that it would have been helpful to have sermon notes provided. If you would like you can access and print out sermon notes ahead of time [here](#). The Home Worship Guide page of our website will be updated and available for your use by Sunday.

Prayer Meetings

Beginning next Monday (3/30), we will be hosting a digital prayer meeting every Monday and Thursday at 12pm. We will begin these prayer meetings promptly at 12pm by reading a short passage of Scripture to frame our time together, and then we will invite all of you to pray briefly in response so that as many people as possible have an opportunity to pray. We will conclude by 12:20pm so that those working can return to work. This week we will begin by praying that God would use this pandemic to move powerfully in Pinellas County and the rest of the world to bring people to repentance and faith in Jesus in response to his gospel.

Youth Group

Beginning next Wednesday (4/1) at 4pm, Rory will begin to host a digital version of youth group to

provide our Middle School and High School students an opportunity to connect to one another. For their first meeting, students will be given an opportunity to check in and reflect on their experiences thus far. The meeting should last up to an hour.

Growth Group.

Beginning next Wednesday (4/1) from 7:30-8:30pm, we will attempt to resume Growth Group. For our first week, we will use the time to check-in as a church body and reflect on what God has been teaching us during this time. The following week, we will resume our class on “Christians and the Government.” Youth who are interested are welcome to join in.

How can I join these digital meetings?

We have decided to use Zoom, a video conferencing tool for all of our meetings. Zoom is available for free on MAC/ PC, iOS, and Android. Keep in mind that a camera and microphone are needed to be seen and heard. A smartphone has these built in as do most modern laptops. If you don't have access to any of these devices you can dial in by phone and participate as if on a conference call. Our Meeting ID is: **542-251-7499**, and all of our meetings can be accessed by visiting [this link](#) at the time of their meeting. You can find instructions for using Zoom via computer, smartphone app, or phone listed below. We will have a “trial” prayer meeting at 4pm this Sunday (3/29) so that you can get familiar with Zoom.

You can find all of this information available on the “[Connect Online](#)” page of our website.

Finally, I know some of you may be longing for even more connection to people. As you get familiar with Zoom, I'd encourage you to consider using it to touch base with a few friends each week to read Scripture, to pray, and to encourage one another to fight the good fight of faith, or simply pick up the directory and call your brothers and sisters in Christ to check in.

I continue to pray that you would have opportunity to rest and reflect, and I hope these opportunities to connect with your brothers and sisters in Christ will be a blessing to you!

Grace and Peace,
Mitchell Cruik, Lead Pastor
Northwood Community Church
mitch@northwoodcc.org

Joining a Zoom Meeting by Computer (a camera and microphone are needed)

- 1. Visit [here](#), to download Zoom.
- 2. Click Join a Meeting
- 3. Enter the Meeting ID: **542-251-7499**

Joining a Meeting by Smartphone

- 1. Visit [here](#), to download Zoom for iOS. Visit [here](#) to download Zoom for Android.
- 2. Click Join a Meeting
- 3. Enter the Meeting ID: **542-251-7499**

Joining a Meeting by Phone Only

- 1. Dial (929)-205-6099.
- 2. You will be prompted to enter the Meeting ID - **542-251-7499**, followed by #.
- 3. If the meeting has not already started you will be prompted to press # to wait if you are participant.

March 20, 2020

Dear Northwood Family,

It's hard to put to words how much it grieves me that we will not be able to gather together for corporate worship tomorrow. Yet one of our dear sisters reminded me recently that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are never free to gather in worship, not because their governments are trying to prevent the spread of a virus but because their governments are opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you worship in your homes tomorrow, please remember in prayer your brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are not able to worship freely because of opposition to the Lordship of Christ.

Additionally, on Thursday pastors had the opportunity to be on a conference call with our State Senator, Marco Rubio. In it I was reminded of how important it is for us to stay up to date on the latest information and safety precautions provided by the CDC and just how deep a treasure of resources God has provided his church to navigate such a time as this. With that in mind, I wanted to pass along some resources that I hope will be a blessing to you during this time.

Resources for Getting Updates on COVID-19

I would urge you to please be conscious of how much time you are spending on cable news and social media. The intensity of the news coverage and the misinformation spread on social media can easily create unnecessary anxiety and fear or could unnecessarily downplay the seriousness of the issues at hand, neither of which is helpful. However, we do need to stay informed, so please visit these websites for the latest information:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Florida Department of Health - <http://www.floridahealth.gov>

Additionally, if you have not seen the Whitehouse's latest recommendation for how you can help slow the spread of the Coronavirus, please visit [here](#).

Resources for Responding to COVID-19 as a Christian

We are blessed that during this time many resources are being generated to help Christians think through their response to COVID-19, to equip us to love our neighbors, and to provide comfort and encouragement during this time. One great resource is [The Gospel Coalition's Coronavirus Coverage](#). They have provided a series of biblical, theological, historical, and practical reflections on how Christians can respond to COVID-19. Here is just a small sample of their article titles: 9 Ways to Work Efficiently from Home, A Practical Way to Love Your (Self-Isolated Neighbor), Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History. Additionally, The Gospel Coalition has created a playlist of Christian songs to provide hope and to encourage worship in a world of fear. You can find the playlist on [Spotify](#), [Apple Music](#), or [Amazon Music](#).

Resources Available at Northwood

As long as we are unable to gather for worship, we will be producing a home worship guide to be updated each Sunday to help facilitate worship in your homes. You can find the most recent home worship guide [here](#). I have also attached *A Simple Guide to Family Worship*, to provide you with tools to practice family worship not just tomorrow but as a regular habit.

If you have a need during this time, please e-mail us at office@northwoodcc.org. **I would also encourage those of you who are at a higher risk for complications if infected by COVID-19 (older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease) to please let us know what errands you need done (grocery shopping, picking up medications, etc.).** Many people from your Northwood Family would love to run these errands during this time so that you don't unnecessarily have to spend time in public.

Finally, although we can't meet, that does not mean we cannot reach out to one another during this time. I have attached Northwood's most recent directory to help us all stay in touch during this time. As we identify more ways to stay connected during this time, we will keep you updated.

As always if you have any questions, comments, or concerns between now and our next update, please feel free to e-mail me at mitch@northwoodcc.org.

I love you all dearly and will miss worshipping with you tomorrow!

Grace and Peace,
Mitchell Cruit, Lead Pastor
Northwood Community Church
mitch@northwoodcc.org

March 19, 2020

Dear Northwood Family,

I hope you are well and are finding comfort in the *"peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"* (Phil 4:7). I have been comforted again and again that Christ is still sitting at the right hand of the Father reigning and ruling. Nothing that has happened in the last several weeks has caught him off guard, and we can be confident that he is using even these groans in creation for the good of those who love God and for the glory of his name among the nations!

Tuesday night the elders were able to begin making plans recognizing even more than usual that we *"do not know what tomorrow will bring"* (Jas 4:14), so all of our plans must be humbly submitted before the Lord's will. That being said I want to answer a few questions we've heard or anticipate and update you with our most recent plans. We will continue to update you as we have new information a few times a week, but if you have questions between updates please feel free to e-mail me at mitch@northwoodcc.org.

What are we going to do about corporate worship with the Northwood Church Family?

Given the most recent recommendations that people refrain from gathering in groups larger than 10, we have decided that all of Northwood's programming will be canceled through the end of the month including corporate worship. We will continue to update you if we need to continue to cancel future events.

The apostle John writes *"Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete"* (2 Jn 12). In other words, John's joy is complete only through embodied, face to face relationships. But since face to face communication was *not possible* John makes a *concession* to use the technology of his day, paper and ink, in order to communicate. We hope that everyone recognizes that the use of digital technology is no substitute for embodied relationships and physically gathering for corporate worship. However since it is not possible for us to gather physically, we have conceded that we must use technology to encourage worship without undermining the value of embodied corporate worship.

While we recognize other churches will seek to navigate these tensions by coming to other legitimate solutions, our elders have decided as long as we are unable to gather for corporate worship, we will be providing a weekly home worship guide through our website that you can use with your families, neighbors, friends, or church family to worship in your homes. The guide will follow the basic outline of a worship service at Northwood including Scripture readings, songs to sing along with, prayer requests, and a sermon. The guide will be available through our website northwoodcc.org/home-worship-guide. If you visit it before Sunday, you will get a blank "page-not-found" message, but don't worry it will be there on Sunday! Additionally, you will find attached *A Simple Guide to Family Worship* to provide you with tools to do family worship at home even before this week's home worship guide is released.

Please follow CDC guidelines if you should choose to invite anyone to participate with you in this at home. As time goes on we will be exploring other ways we can use technology to stay connected to one another and grounded in God's Word together. Next week you can be on the look out for some video communication from me.

What should we do about giving to Northwood?

We know that this is a time of financial uncertainty for many people. If you are one of the people

adversely affected financially by the measures being taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, please let us know so that we can provide any help you may need. However, if you are financially unaffected by the spread of COVID-19, you can continue to give to Northwood by:

- 1) Writing checks and mailing them to the church (2295 N McMullen Booth Rd, Clearwater, FL 33759). Please include ATTN: JS on the address line of your envelope.
- 2) Setting up Northwood as one of your “payees” through your online banking.
- 3) Dropping off gifts with Trish at the church Monday, Wednesday, or Fridays from 9am-4pm.

What can we do to care for one another and love our neighbor during this time?

If you have a need, please let us know. Some needs may include someone running errands to the grocery store or taking you to the doctor. We especially hope those of you who are most at risk for complications from COVID-19 will let us know if you do not yet have an alternative way to get groceries. Additional needs may also include access to critical items currently out of stock in stores. If you are willing to run errands or are willing to share some of your extra supplies that are in high demand right now, please let us know.

As we practice social distancing, please don't forget your church family, the lost, the lonely, and the left out, but instead look for opportunities to love, serve, and encourage people. Please be on the look out for missional gospel opportunities. Much of the world is living in fear, considering the brevity of life, and has been forced to consider the most important questions of life. As you interact with those who don't have the hope of Christ, point them to Jesus as their only hope in the midst of these uncertain times.

How should I pray?

- Pray that God would use these new measures to slow the spread of the virus and protect high-risk populations.
- Pray that God would give you opportunities to testify to the hope you have in Christ so that during these uncertain times others might place their hope in Christ.
- Pray that the governing authorities and Northwood's leaders would have wisdom to love our neighbors.

Thank you for your continued prayers. As always let us continue to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Grace and Peace,
Mitchell Cruik, Lead Pastor
Northwood Community Church
mitch@northwoodcc.org

March 16, 2020

Dear Northwood Family,

Last night, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) posted a new recommendation for large gatherings. They are recommending that gatherings of 50 people or more be canceled for the next 8 weeks. Their recommendation has been made specifically to reduce introduction of the virus into new communities and to slow the spread of infection in communities already affected by the virus.

Additionally, this afternoon in a briefing the White House made additional recommendations that for the next 15 days individuals both avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people *and* follow the directions of their state and local authorities. At this point it is not yet clear whether Florida or Pinellas County will direct Florida residents, businesses, and communities to follow these new guidelines or whether the White House's recommendations have replaced the CDC's recommendations.

In light of this, I want to address a few questions:

What do these recommendations mean for Northwood?

We have already received notice that the reservations for both the Spring Picnic and our Easter Celebration in Safety Harbor have been canceled since our gathering would exceed the CDC's recommended limitation of 50 people. Additionally, **we are canceling all of our scheduled activities this week including the Ladies' Dessert Social, AWANA, and Youth Group.**

What about gathering for corporate worship?

At this point, we are still waiting for more information to better understand how the White House's recommendation relates to the CDC's recommendations and how it will be implemented by our state and local authorities. In the meantime we are beginning to explore creative alternatives to gathering for corporate worship in order to fulfill Hebrews' exhortation to "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" (Heb 10:24-25). Once we have been able to come up with a plan, we will let you know.

What should I do if I get sick?

- 1) Please let us know so that we can ensure that you receive the care you need.
- 2) Please stay home to rest, recover, and to ensure you do not spread whatever you have to anyone else (COVID-19 or otherwise).
- 3) If you show symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath), please contact Pinellas County Health Department by phone to receive instructions for being tested for COVID-19. Their phone number is 727-824-6900.

Should we have any concerns about the government encouraging churches not to gather for corporate worship during this season?

Personally, I recognize that considerations related to infectious disease are outside of my expertise and competency, and there are a whole host of factors our authorities need to consider for the well-being of our country. Further, as long as our government is encouraging the canceling of all large gatherings, not just faith-based gatherings, their counsel gives us an opportunity to tangibly love our neighbors by setting aside our rights for the sake of the well-being of the whole community.

For further resources on this issue, please see [this article](#) for historical precedent, [this podcast episode](#) for concise thoughts on this particular question, and [this podcast episode](#) for a broader conversation on how our faith should shape the way we relate to the spread of COVID-19.

How should I pray?

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower us to trust Christ in the midst of uncertain times.
- Pray that God would slow the spread of the virus and protect high-risk populations.
- Pray that God would create opportunities for Christ to be glorified through our witness.
- Pray that the governing authorities and Northwood’s leaders would have wisdom to love our neighbors.

Thank you for your continued prayers. Let us continue to trust Jesus, who is holding all these things together even now.

Grace and Peace,
Mitchell Cruit, Lead Pastor
Northwood Community Church
mitch@northwoodcc.org

March 13, 2020

Dear Northwood Family,

In recent weeks, each passing day has greeted us with a new wave of updates relating to the COVID-19 outbreak.

While much of the media and public reaction to the virus could be described as fearful, as believers we must respond to each new update with wisdom as well as trust in the sovereignty of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is not surprised by any of the unfolding news, is holding creation together right now, and is using all things including the COVID-19 outbreak for the good of his people and the glory of his name among the nations. However, while fear on our part is not warranted, neither is foolishness.

In light of the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and our State Government, we have an opportunity during this time to both honor the governing authorities and to love our neighbors by doing our best to prevent the continuing spread of the virus in a county where many of those most at risk for developing serious complications from COVID-19 live. With that in mind I want to offer you the latest information from our authorities and Northwood's current plan.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

Who is at a higher risk for complications if they are infected by COVID-19?

Those that are at higher risk include older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease. If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of your age or because you have a serious long-term health problem, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease. Based on available evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults.

What are the current recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19?

The state has encouraged gatherings larger than 250 to be canceled and has encouraged those at higher risk for complications to avoid large crowds. In addition, the CDC encourages these preventative measures:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects such as your laptops and phone.
- Covering your cough and/or sneeze with a tissue on your arm.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home if you are unwell, except to get medical care.
- Staying home if you have traveled internationally for at least two weeks.

What is Northwood doing to avoid fear *and* act with wisdom?

Since our gathering for corporate worship is well under the state's current concerns, we are, as of now, still planning to gather for corporate worship on Sunday. However, we would like to encourage four groups of people to refrain from attending corporate worship, Youth Group, and AWANA:

- 1) Those who are at a higher risk for complications.
- 2) Those who are experiencing the symptoms connected to COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath).
- 3) Those who have traveled internationally within the last two weeks.
- 4) Those who have had contact with someone who has been infected with COVID-19.

Additionally, we have no reason to believe that our facilities have been exposed to the virus, but we are taking measures to ensure that our facilities are sanitized. Finally, during our gatherings we will make an adjustment to the way we take up the offering in order to minimize the possible spread of germs, and we request that everyone abide by the preventative measures recommended by the CDC.

How will Northwood be updated if anything changes?

Since more information is being released daily, we will be monitoring updates in the latest information and will inform you of any changes in three ways. We will send out an e-mail update, we will update our Facebook page, and we will update our website with the latest information. Please check those places for our latest updates.

What can I do to love my neighbors, honor the governing authorities, and demonstrate my trust in Christ?

- 1) Please remember that all steps we are taking are preventative and precautionary; there is no cause for alarm.
- 2) Please ensure any information you pass along is reliable and accurate.
- 3) Please abide by the guidelines we've provided and the CDC has provided.
- 4) Please pray for one another and the areas of the world more affected by the outbreak. Ask that God would provide protection, wisdom, and gospel opportunities during this challenging time.

Thank you for your prayers, and thank you for joining us in walking with both wisdom and trust in our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is holding all things together.

Grace and Peace,
Mitchell Cruik, Lead Pastor
Northwood Community Church
mitch@northwoodcc.org