



Should We Have Church Services?

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CLEVELAND, TN: “Should we have church services this week?” In the church “world,” there is probably no question that is being asked more often than that single question. While there is no easy answer, I think it is important that we consider the different options.

I have even been asked, “Could this virus change the way we do church forever?” We certainly hope that this will not be the case. However, due to the fear of spreading the virus, many churches have started to rethink the option of providing “electronic church” through livestream, Facebook Live, and other video sources. In times when states are limiting the number of people who can assemble in one place, many churches are looking at alternative methods of holding services.

But what about the immediate days ahead? Should we have church services this week? On March 15, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommended that groups no larger than 50 people should meet together. Then in President Trump’s press conference on March 16, he suggested that for the next 15 days, no group larger than 10 people should meet. So where does that leave churches?

Since the beginning of this crisis, I have suggested that churches should follow the recommendations of their local and state health officials. In the early days, some officials were suggesting that groups no larger than 250, or 100, or some other number, should meet. To comply with those restrictions, some of our larger congregations basically met in multiple locations to be under the recommended number. However, for the next 15 days the recommended number is no more than 10 people. How can churches continue to operate and hold services if no more than 10 people can congregate together?

To stop the spread of the coronavirus and to bring an end to the current crisis, the recommendation has been that our churches follow the advice of their health officials and limit groups from congregating that are greater than 10 people. That may require that small groups, Sunday school classes, and other self-identified groups within the church meet in corporate worship while watching a video presentation of the sermon. It may be that the local church leaders decide not to have any group meetings and only use some form of electronic church.

However, it is important that the corporate body of the local church stay intact as much as possible during this time. How you do that will differ from one church to another. Regardless of which method is chosen, or which process works in your area, the church must remain a community of believers. If we lose that sense of community, we will lose the essence and strength of our Church body.



I have heard from a number of pastors who obviously dislike the idea of any governmental official telling them that they cannot have service. Understandably, this elicits concerns about “freedom of religion” under the First Amendment. However, keep in mind that while you may have a right to assemble and practice your religious beliefs, we also have a right and a responsibility to be good neighbors to those in our community. Under no circumstances would we want an outbreak of the coronavirus or any other illness to be spread within our congregation, or to others.

Even in times when we are under recommendations by governmental officials not to meet together in larger crowds, it still remains important for the church body to know that we are a group of connected believers. Maintaining that connection may differ from church to church and from one group to another within the same church. But without a doubt, we must remain the body of Christ. Joined together with the same purpose - and with a commitment to see the Great Commission fulfilled and completed within our community, our state, our nation, and our world.

Hebrews 10:25 encourages us not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” That Day is certainly approaching. And while we may not be able to have our “normal” services over the next couple of weeks, we must find every way possible to keep the body of Christ together and looking for our Savior’s soon return.

As a final personal note, be assured that as we move through the next several days, no one is considered unfaithful or disloyal to the Lord’s work as worship services are re-arranged and even cancelled. We must and will get through this crises and when we do, it will be said, “the Church of God was a great witness to the World.”