

WESTSIDE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR CONCERNING COVID-19

MARCH 15, 2020

Greetings to all the families and friends that make up this beloved community, The Westside Missionary Baptist Church (The Net). It is my pleasure to be able to communicate with you through this letter. I thank you so much for allowing me space to reflect and recharge with a month of self-care. Though I have not been there with you in body, my prayers are constant for you and I feel yours for me. Our God is truly great and God is greatly to be praised!

In this heightened moment of COVID-19 (the coronavirus) we are still aware of God's goodness and grace to all who bear God's image. Yet we will continue to seek the guidance of health professionals concerning important aspects of this pandemic. Our reliance on the Divine is never a reason to be in denial of issues that invade the world we occupy. To be good citizens of The Kingdom of God we must be good neighbors to those we share space with.

It is crucial at this time that we work with one another in observing what we are being told. As our government is seeking ways to contain COVID-19, the top 2 recommendations are social distancing (keeping at least 3-6 ft. of distance) and common sense hygiene (washing your hands, coughing in your elbow, staying home if you are sick). Gatherings of large crowds or a significant amount of people in small spaces have been discouraged due to the contagiousness of this virus. At this time we have no plans of cancelling our services, however, as we all know this situation is fluid and changes by the hour. I admonish us all to keep in contact with each other, sign up for our church's text blast and consult our website and Facebook page for any possible changes.

For us as a church this brings a significant theological issue to the forefront. If church services pose a serious enough health risk does that stop us from BEING the church? Figuring out ways to BE the church without putting each other at risk is what I believe The Lord desires. And maybe that is God's challenge to us in this moment in time.

Neighbors, this is not an issue of faith or the lack thereof. In the words of one of my favorite theologians, Candice Benbow, "If anything, this moment is going to reveal how poorly we have constructed "faith." It is not simply asking "whose report do you believe?" Faith is honoring information presented, acting accordingly, while believing God for constant presence and help in troubling times."

I cannot speak for any other church or pastor concerning how they choose to navigate through this abrupt and inconvenient interruption of our lives. But for our faith community, REAL theological reflection needs to happen while we detox ourselves of toxic "faith" sound bites. Being concerned and cautious in the midst of this pandemic is not an indication of one's lack of faith. It is a healthy FAITHFUL concern for all of humanity. Let not our perceived spiritual superiority inflate our egos to the point that we start to believe that we cannot be touched by COVID-19. And even though we may be able to withstand the virus or do not end up sick from interacting with it, each of us has dear family, friends and community members who may be more vulnerable, to whom we may carry the virus.

I am convinced that in the era of major technological advances that I am not well-versed and as a consequence we are not as equipped for moments like this as we should be. Major steps need to be taken immediately to take advantage of available ways that technology has given us to remain connected when the unforeseen happen.

Healthcare professionals are clear that the most vulnerable to COVID-19 are our senior citizens and those with underlying health issues. We suggest that if you are in either of those demographics that you consider staying home as we as a church minister to you right where you are.

If we are required in the future to have to cancel our services or you cannot make it to church, please remember that our church still has obligations. We have families that we employ that depend on us for their primary financial income. You can still give via our website (WestsideMBC.com) or by cash-app ([\\$WMBCTheNet](https://www.paycommerchants.com/cash-app)).

May we breathe together with recommended distance, and may we hold one another in spirit, in wellness and mutual beloved-ness, even if physical distance between us may necessarily increase. We have a journey ahead of us as God's faithful. But we all will share in the responsibility of shepherding one another in strength and in peace. And while these times are trying, we stand in God, with God, and for one another knowing we will conquer this together.

Whatever winds may blow, the Holy Spirit is present always to help us respond and realign.

Do Justice. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly

Pastor Timothy Careathers