

April 5, 2020

Greetings to all our dear brethren and your families from the elders of the Westlake church of Christ. We continue in our prayers and well-wishes for each of you, for all your loved ones and for the leaders of this country as we all fight this war against the Covid-19 virus. In the text below we will provide an update on our latest decisions regarding the assemblies as we well as bible classes.

First, we want to express our deepest appreciation to all for your continued prayers and care for one another. We understand how challenging this time of isolation can be. Let us all always remember it is so wonderful and important that we focus and be aware we are never alone since we are in in the kingdom with Jesus and our glorious, powerful God (Phil. 4: 4-8). We so encouraged to know of so many instances of calls simply checking on one another that all is well, by emails and messaging, by the providing of meals or supplies by some and the other actions in support of one another, not just of our brethren but also of our neighbors. We are so grateful for these expressions of love! We are so thankful that to our knowledge at this time none of our brethren or their family members have been diagnosed with the virus! Praise God!

Some that we are aware of that are in need of prayers and possibly other help:

- The Collins family in the passing of Ryan's grandfather, Deena's father, RC Hively on this past Wednesday, April 1.
- Kevin Meine as he continues to have some on-going medical tests and treatments.
- Joel McDaniel and family as Joel is recovering from chicken pox.
- Those that face on-going health issues, Jim Stephens, Linda Starkey and others on the prayer list

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- Prayers for Clint as he faces some physical challenges.
- For all who struggle with the fear, anxiety, depression and stress that may be a part of coping with these stressful times.
- For all our health care providers and all personnel providing care.

Please let us know if there are others that are in need of specific prayers, or simply encouragement.

Regarding our assemblies, it is with a very heavy heart that we have decided that we will need to extend the cancellation of all our assemblies and physical gatherings for bible classes, in accordance with the State of Missouri directive which is currently no public assemblies through April 24th. This decision distresses us greatly, but as we have prayed and studied on this. As the elders we have an obligation to make the best decisions that we are able, both in the aspect of physical care where we have responsibility, along with our spiritual responsibilities. Brethren as we have stated before, these measures have everything to do with our brethren in caring for one another more than ourselves in accordance with scripture. We pray for God's guidance and mercy in these decisions in this present time of distress.

We will continue to offer bible studies through various means such as Facebook Live Streaming, Zoom and other opportunities. Look for emails and calling post notifications of these and we encourage all to take advantage of this time and opportunities. We see so many that are, and we are very encouraged by this!

We do not plan to offer any virtual worship assemblies or to assemble in our cars and we will explain our decision below. Before we continue in our explanation, we want to make it clear we are not being judgmental, critical nor condemning any

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congregation, elders or individuals who have made a decision to join those who have made a different decision. We understand aspects of this present distress make decisions a matter of personal conscience in accordance with teaching in Romans and so we must act and behave with compassion and mercy.

Don and I have prayed, studied scripture extensively, discussed in depth with Marshall, other preachers, other brethren, other elders in many locations and listened to several on-line sermons and discussions before making our decision. We will be glad to discuss further with any who would desire to speak with us.

First, we must be very careful in our great desire to find a way for us to meet and observe the Lord's Supper in accordance with scripture in the time of present distress. It is important that we do so, not by applying the logic of situational ethics to justify a decision but rather to make a decision about the present distress situation in accordance with His word, the scriptures. We also have to be very careful about using the argument, that the silence of scripture is an authorization for an action in this present distress, even if the motivation for that decision is love. We have all studied this and know that silence of scripture does not authorize. Again, just to re-enforce, we are not making any accusation or judgement toward others, only referring to ourselves as we strive to make our decisions as elders of our Westlake family, in accordance to God's word and right in His sight.

In accordance with our understanding of scripture, our congregation will not utilize a virtual assembly to observe the Lord's Supper. There are two aspects that must be considered to before deciding that a virtual assembly is appropriate. First of course is whether are we of the mind it is authorized and second

if authorized then what are the longer-term results from a decision to go forward, especially in consideration of potentially weaker brethren. To the first, at the institution of the Lord's supper, the disciples were physically present; in Acts clearly, the churches were assembled together; and Paul especially is very specific in 1st Corinthians about the church coming together. 1st Corinthians in multiple places is very clear about what is discussed, is when the church family comes physically together as an assembly for worship. In chapter 11 and then again in chapter 14 he uses the phrase "when you come together" and it is clearly seen this is the physical assembling of the church together for worship and for remembrance of our Lord's sacrifice. Paul details the aspects of what is appropriate and is specific in his reference about them being physically together. In chapter 14 in verses 20 and 23, he again is very specific in stating "the whole church be come together into one place". In one place, very clear and very specific, the church is coming physically together in the same location for the specific purpose of worship. Look also at the definitions of virtual (found in multiple dictionaries but all are very similar):

- Is almost or nearly as described, but not completely or according to strict definition.
- Is not physically existing as such but made by software to appear to do so
- Is carried out, accessed, or stored by means of a computer, especially over a network.

By all of these definitions of a virtual meeting does not mean that the congregation is assembled in our understanding of the scripture. Again, if one of our number makes a decision that they can assemble virtually, your decision falls under the matter of Romans and personal conscience, we will not make this a matter of fellowship. As we stated before, we are not implying criticism or judgement of any other congregation but as for our congregation

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we will not offer virtual worship, specifically observance of the Lord's Supper.

What about Christians observing the Lord's Supper in their own homes when more than one Christian is present? This question is actually the more difficult one and definitively falls under personal conscience of Romans. It is clear from multiple places in scripture that churches met in the homes of saints. No question Christians meeting as a church in a home is authorized. The question then becomes is your home now the church since the church of which you are a part, is not currently meeting. We the elders are being very clear that we are not disbanding our local congregation, that this situation of current distress to our best knowledge and through prayer, trust in God, is a temporary suspension of our worship assemblies for the safety and well-being of our brethren. As we indicated this is difficult and not as clear. Therefore, we must leave this decision to the heads of your household and each of you. If you decide together in your home to observe the Lord's supper, we respect the decision of each of you in accordance to your personal conscience and understanding of teaching in Romans.

What about using an FM transmitter and assembling together in our cars in the parking lot? We also considered this in detail and our decision is not to do this. Again, it is a question of are we truly assembled together if we do this. Even setting aside that discussion for a moment however, our understanding from discussing and reading the inputs of various experts, there is simply too much risk to our brethren for even this type of assembly. It simply does not meet the best guidelines for avoiding exposure to the virus. Additionally, we believe under the current guidelines of the state this would not be lawful. We have decided not to do this at this time.

What about holding virtual bible classes but yet not virtual worship assemblies and observances of the Lord's Supper? This is a good question and the answer really is pretty straightforward from scripture. The command to go and teach is general, not specific in the how but specific in what is to be taught. Matthew 28:19 "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Here and in other places the going is not specified, so walking, using boats, chariots, cars other means are authorized. We also have example of speaking, writing, supporting preachers, etc. directly in scripture etc. so most methods like Facetime Live, Zoom are clearly authorized for teaching. Continuing in verse 20 we are seeing some of the specifics of what we are to teach "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you". This second part of this command is what we addressed in the paragraph above where the command and teaching is specific in 1st Corinthians, not general.

We need God. We need each other. We need the nurturing of God's word, the lifting up of our spirits and countenances in songs, and so much more. But God does not want us to make foolish decisions that put our lives and the lives of others at risk. We know this may not answer all your questions, but we hope this gives you some insight into how we came to our decision as well as confidence that we are seeking to lead in accordance to scripture as the basis for those decisions not because of our opinion or personal desires. We pray for God's mercy through His Son that the decisions we make are those that are best for each of you and for us as the local congregation for which we, as the elders, and each of you as a member, are responsible for. We love and deeply appreciate each of you.

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