



Dear Church of the Palms Family:

I hope this letter finds you well and taking great care in the midst of this evolving health crisis. The leadership of our church is constant in prayer for all of you and we hope to do what we can to bring hope and encouragement to our community as we journey through these days.

We hope you were able to view our Livestream worship on Sunday and to participate with us as we gave glory to God "in all circumstances". Our apologies to those who sought us out on Comcast Channel 189 on Sunday only to find a dark screen. Once again, our friends at Comcast had technical issues over which we had no control. We are working hard to do what we can to rectify these issues this week.

Our staff and elders are fast coming up with ways to move forward in our ministry. As you are aware, we have suspended worship and all on-campus activities for the indefinite future. By direction of the White House, we are encouraging all of our people to refrain from meeting in any size groups until otherwise recommended by our governing authorities. Most of our staff have been sent home to work remotely. Our office will remain open through this Friday the 20th with a small team doing essential office duties. The office will be closed beginning Saturday the 21st but we will still receive phone calls and mail (should you be sending in your contributions). We plan to close our Palms Preschool at the end of Wednesday, March 18. Samaritan Counseling will continue using their offices. As we are aware that this crisis may greatly affect those experiencing food insecurity, our Food Pantry will remain open. Primarily staff and available volunteers will operate it.

It is our aim to be in contact with you as much as possible during this time. While we cannot necessarily be present with each other physically, we are putting together plans to connect with you via all the great tools of technology. Beginning Monday, March 23rd we intend to share with you a daily reflection, offered by our staff, to keep our hearts and minds focused on the presence of God. We will be distributing this via a daily email, Facebook, our website, and a message offered on our Prayer Line. If you have not been receiving our email updates and wish to, please call the church office and we will put you on our list (941-924-1323). You may call the same number and dial "7" and it will direct you to our Prayer Line for a new reflection every day. You can get prayer requests to us via our website as well. Just go to the bottom of the homepage and click on Prayer Request. We encourage you to daily check our website and Facebook page for any updates we have shared.

Of course, join us again on Sunday for our Livestream worship and (hopefully) our broadcast on Comcast 189. If you are unsure of how to Livestream, please seek out a friend or family member and they may be able to assist you. We are eager to weekly be within the communion of saints worshipping together.

Our goal is to reach out to those with whom we are unable to connect electronically through phone calls and notes from staff, Shepherding Deacons and Stephen Ministers. We don't want anyone to feel disconnected from their church family.



If you or someone you know in our church has been admitted to the hospital please call that information into the church office and we will do our best to connect with them by phone. The local hospitals will soon be limiting visits to family and medical professionals.

As with all families, we encourage everyone to do what they can to lend a hand. And while we cannot lend our physical hands at this time, we hope that you will commit to the following tangible ways you can help your church family:

- **Pray** for our church and for our witness to the community at this time. We sense that times like these give us the chance to shine with the grace and kindness of God. Pray that we will be strong and courageous in our ministry to the community.
- **Connect** with people you know in our church. Maybe you have that little group of friends you sit with or meet with – make a point to call or text and find out how they are doing. Maybe they can use some encouragement or some help getting groceries or just a reminder that they are being thought of.
- **Give** what you can. Our ministry right now very badly needs your support. Without a weekly passing offering plate, it will require many of us to step forward with an extra measure of financial support to help keep us doing the things we wish to do to serve our congregants and community. Fortunately there are many ways to do so without having to come to the campus:
 - Mail us your checks at Church of the Palms, 3224 Bee Ridge Rd., Sarasota, FL 34239.
 - Give online by going to the website and clicking the “Give” icon at the top of the homepage.
 - Set up an automatic transfer from your bank.

Your vigilance in giving will allow us to be vigilant in our ministry.

This week I encouraged our staff to think of this time as an opportunity to meet this contagious virus with a different contagion – a Kindness Contagion. The prophet says that the Lord requires of us “to do justice, **love kindness** and to walk humbly with our God.” Let this be our mission going forward in these days – that our neighbors near and far will see through us the kindness of God.

Grace and peace,

Stephen D. McConnell