

Bethesda Christian Fellowship Church of God RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Dear BCF Family and Friends:

We are in a time, unlike any we have ever witnessed. Our lives have changed dramatically in the last ten days. Who of us could have ever imagined a situation of global quarantine due to an unknown virus? Whatever we experience during this pandemic, we know that we belong to the Lord, and we can depend on God for our protection. We live and move and have our being because of God's mercy. None of us takes God's grace for granted, and we look to the Holy Spirit for guidance in every area of our lives, even the coronavirus pandemic. This outbreak is a worldwide matter. People everywhere are affected by this outbreak Christian or not. Our theology informs us that disease and illness are a result of humankind's fall into sin. However, that does *not* mean that sickness is *sin*. We humans encounter all types of health problems, and we give thanks that medical professionals have studied and devoted themselves to researching and treating disease. Because God has gifted them, we *need to pay attention* to what health professionals and our elected leaders are recommending.

As Christians, we treat our neighbors like we treat ourselves. Also, this pandemic provides an opportunity for us to be examples of God's love, even in this situation. People of God do not target or scapegoat others to explain this public health crisis. We do not use it to make hermeneutical interpretations that the virus will lead to the end of time. ***We know that as God was in charge of the beginning, and God will determine the end. No preacher ministry, prophet, or apostle has that information. As loving disciples of Christ, please remember this in our interactions with others.*** Let's use this pandemic as a way of loving people into the kingdom.

After prayer and careful deliberation, consultation with our Board of Directors, Pastors, ministry leadership team, Bethesda, under God, will IMMEDIATELY discontinue all in-person worship activities, rehearsals, ministries, administrative meetings or associated events until further notice.

While there may be questions about this action, we desire to care for one another by lessening person to person contagion that can occur more easily when large groups are in close contact. Secondly, our governor and the governors in the tri-state area have mandated that there be ***no gatherings of 50*** or more persons. ***Everyone is requested to shelter*** in place and to use caution when going to public places like grocery or drug stores.

Bethesda Christian Fellowship will continue to worship together using Livestream and Facebook. We are exploring other ways of remaining in connection with one another through different platforms, which may include video technologies like Zoom or Skype, teleconferencing and messaging. As our Technology Ministry works alongside us, we will keep you abreast. The coronavirus pandemic forces us to think about sharing the gospel in creative new ways. We have heard reports that in one week, congregations that have streamed their services are reaching a wider audience than ever before. God has not given us a spirit of fear; we trust in God's power to strengthen us and keep us balanced and of sound mind.

Please know that I love being your pastor, and I am praying for each of you.

Blessings,

Pastor Horace W. Sheppard, Jr. Senior Pastor