



**COVID-19**

◆ *A Church Response Plan* ◆

**TERRA NOVA CHURCH**

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

~ Proverbs 3:5-6

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## SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES

Terra Saratoga Family,

In the days ahead, there are two considerations we will have to navigate carefully:

1. Our responsibility to society-at-large in taking seriously the effectiveness of social distancing to slow the spread of the virus.
2. Our responsibility to our neighbor (inside and outside the church) in caring for the needs that will arise due to the virus and its ripple effect.

(There is a third thing to consider, which is our personal soul care. But more on that later.)

The tendency for many of us will be to embrace one of these at the expense of the other: Either neighboring at the expense of social distancing, or social distancing at the expense of neighboring. The former misses the forest for the trees, and the later misses the trees for the forest, per se.

To see one or the other as exclusively right is a false dichotomy; both are examples of loving our neighbor. It takes vision to understand the necessity of social distancing, and it takes a willingness to sacrifice and take appropriate risks to meet the needs of those around us.

In instances like these, it can be easier and more comfortable to pick an extreme and live there. But the harder and better road is to discern what wisdom looks like (gathering facts, consulting with others, knowing truth), and then seek to be in step with the Spirit, who is sometimes less conventional.

God calls us to both: Wisdom and a kind of sacrifice which sometimes appears to defy wisdom.

So before going any further, let me just say, both of these are important. And the most important thing of all is that we are in prayer about these things. Do not let this be a divisive issue. If we listen and learn from each other (and

above all, are seeking God together), we will find ourselves pulling in the same direction.

## CHURCH RESPONSE PLAN

With all of this in mind, the following is our church's plan for moving forward in this unique season (please know that any of this is subject to change at the discretion of the pastors or as new information becomes available):

### **Corporate Gatherings**

As previously indicated, we are suspending live services through at least the month of March, and will continue to reevaluate as we go. This decision is in accordance with the latest government requirements (as of this writing), including New York State's ban of gathering crowds of 50 or more, as well as the urging of the federal government to limit gatherings to fewer than 10.

### **Other Official Church Functions**

#### Church Calendar Events

For the time being, this suspension also includes all church calendar events slated to gather in-person, such as Poiema Dines, volunteer meetings, the baptism class, and the Redemption Groups celebration.

#### Tribes

Tribes are the life-blood of community at Terra, and will continue to meet under the following guidelines:

- Tribes are being asked not to gather in large groups (often referred to as the "all together" setting) due to the size of these gatherings, and also the difficulty of ensuring that our younger children are as vigilant as we are about maintaining strict safety protocols. However, at the discretion of each Tribe leader, smaller groups of adults committed to practicing the following protocols may continue to meet:

- *Not participating if feeling sick or in a job setting that requires a high risk of potential exposure.*
  - *Disinfecting doorknobs and other surfaces before and after meetings.*
  - *Washing hands upon arrival to location.*
  - *Giving 6 ft of distance between people at all times.*
  - *Not shaking hands, hugging, etc.*
- For most Tribes, this likely looks like the men's / women's gatherings, which typically amount to 6 +/- people, preferably meeting outdoors, if possible.
  - We realize a gathering of any size increases the risk of exposure and spread, but we also recognize the deep spiritual / emotional needs that may be judged to outweigh the risks. We urge prayerful discretion at this point.
  - Additionally, Tribe leaders are being provided with and trained in the use of the Zoom video conferencing platform as an alternative to in-person gatherings— *this approach is being strongly advised.*

Please note that this is a rapidly changing situation. If the federal or state governments implement new protocols of stricter size limitations to group gatherings, we will comply with these regulations.

Again, the heart behind the limitations for both corporate and small group settings is that gathering people of *any size* has been shown to potentially multiply the speed of the virus' spread. While the majority of those who get the virus will not become severely ill, we are capable of transmitting the virus to those who are more vulnerable before we even realize we have it. If you are young and healthy, realize that social distancing is not primarily about you; you are loving your more vulnerable neighbors by taking this seriously.

### **Spiritual Care**

We realize there are real stresses and strains that have / will continue to come with the coronavirus and its ripple effects. We also realize that given the

strategy in place, people may feel more isolated from their normal outlets for community and counsel. Please know we have the following in place if you are in need of spiritual care:

## Counseling

- ***If you are in a Tribe:*** Your Tribe members / leaders are likely the ones who know you best. Lean into each other during this time. If additional care / counseling is needed beyond what your Tribe can provide, have your Tribe leader reach out to one of the pastors, and we will connect you with a member of our counseling team.\*
- ***If you are not in a Tribe:*** First of all, consider [joining a Tribe](#)— now is as good of a time as ever to plug into one of these communities at Terra! However, you can also [reach out to one of the pastors](#), and we will connect you with a member of our counseling team.\*

\*All members of our counseling team, whether professionally certified or not, are functioning as lay counselors in the context of serving our church family.

## Prayer

- ***Facebook Prayer Group:*** As of the release of this plan, we have created a [Terra Saratoga Prayer Group](#) on Facebook where prayer requests can be shared among those who call Terra home. Please go to the link above to request permission to join the group, and feel free to share requests and pray for others in our church family who post there. (If you do not have access to Facebook, you may send requests [HERE](#), and we will post for you.)
- ***Weekly Zoom Prayer Group:*** Additionally, we will have at least two virtual prayer gatherings a week that anyone in the above prayer group will be able to access through a meeting link posted within that group. As of now, we have two recurring one-hour gatherings on

Wednesdays at 8am and 8pm. (If you do not have access to Facebook, you may request access to the Zoom meeting link [HERE](#).)

## Truth & Encouragement

- **Sunday Video Services:** While we will not be meeting in person on Sundays, each week we plan to prepare a video with a devo or teaching, worship songs, and announcements / updates to aid your family in a time of worship at home. We will link to these through this [page on our website](#), as well as our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) accounts. You can also directly subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) where all our videos are posted.

## Practical Care (For Our Church Family)

The same stresses and strains referred to above may result in a variety of practical needs that arise during this time. The following outlines a plan for “need awareness” in our church family:

## Meeting Needs

- **If you are in a Tribe:** These are your go-to people for starters. Brainstorm ways within your Tribe community that you can help meet the practical needs of those within your Tribe, and those one degree removed who are outside your Tribe (neighbors, etc.). If a need arises that you’re not sure how to address, you can [email Pastor Matt](#), and he may post it to our [Needs Group](#)\* on the Planning Center.
- **If you are not in a Tribe:** If a need arises for yourself, your family, or someone else you know that you aren’t sure how to address, you can [email Pastor Matt](#), and he may post it to our [Needs Group](#)\* on the Planning Center.

\*Our Needs Group is a way of making the broader community at Terra aware of a need that may not be able to be met by an individual person or Tribe. Please join [HERE](#), if you have not already.

## **Practical Care (For Our Neighbors)**

A lot of what the needs will be for our neighbors and communities remains to be seen. But one thing each of us can do in the meantime is reach out to the neighbors closest to you: Exchange contact information if you've not already done so, or introduce yourself if you never have before (step back from the door and give them 6 ft, of course!). Let them know that you're willing to help out if you can. Very practically, there will likely be sick or vulnerable people who need to self-quarantine who you could help out by picking up some needed supplies if you're out shopping anyway. Granting the challenge of the isolation piece, this could nonetheless be a time that brings neighborhood communities together in a way we haven't seen in a long time. Shared trials have a way of doing that.

## **PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES**

Earlier I alluded to a third consideration that needs to be in the forefront of our minds: personal soul care. Amidst the adrenaline of adjusting to drastic change (for some of us), or the temptation to hole-up and veg in front of the TV (for others), it will be all too easy to depend on or seek comfort in things less than Jesus. Don't waste this season. God is wanting to work in your life in a deep way.

Additionally, history has shown that, in times of great uncertainty and calamity, God's people remain a beacon of peace, hope, and compassion to a fearful world. With this in mind:

- This is a time to strengthen our walk with God in prayer.
- This is a time for families to read the promises of God's Word together.
- This is a time to communicate with one another in the church family to pray, care, and encourage.

- This is a time to serve others in need such as delivering food to an elderly neighbor.
- This is a time, as you walk the neighborhood in the fresh air, to pray for each home you pass interceding for the families.
- This is a time to share the Good News of hope in Christ.

One recent article from Christianity Today reminds us of what is most important in such times: trust God, pray, care for the sick, stay informed, and make plans. “In these anxious days, the Church can shine as a light of hope, care, faith, patience, and prudence, demonstrating for the world how our faith provides true assurance against worry and fear.”

May that be true of us in this time.

In His Love,  
The Terra Saratoga Elders  
(Pastor’s Daniel and Matt)

## BULLET POINT SUMMARY

- **Live corporate gatherings are suspended** through at least the month of March. Digital Sunday services will be available by 9am on our [YouTube channel](#).
- **All other in-person church functions are likewise suspended** unless otherwise notified by the elders.
- **The one exception are Tribes**, which will meet at the discretion of the Tribe leaders under the following criteria:
  - Smaller groups (<10) of adults-only following the social distancing protocols outlined above. Zoom video meetings are being encouraged as a more effective social distancing alternative.
- **Spiritual care will be ongoing** through providing:
  - Counseling (Tribes, counseling team)
  - Prayer ([Facebook prayer group](#), Zoom prayer gatherings)
  - Truth & Encouragement (Sunday virtual services)
- **Practical care will continue** through Tribes, and corporately through awareness on our Needs Group ([please join](#)). You can email [matt@terranovachurch.org](mailto:matt@terranovachurch.org) with a request to post in this group.