

As things rapidly change in our community these days, I want to provide some real-time updates as well as our leadership's heart on the current reality.

First things first: in light of Niagara-specific cases of COVID-19, as well as our Health Officials' restrictions on group gatherings, **our weekend services will temporarily shift to exclusively online experiences effective this Sunday until further notice.** You'll be able to access and engage in our online services [here](#). Since some in our community don't readily access information electronically, please help get the word out to anyone in your circle who may not receive this communiqué.

Beyond Sunday services, since we're being encouraged to implement "social distancing" as a way of limiting the virus' spread, our midweek large-group programs (like Alpha, R!OT, CURRENT, etc.) are also being suspended immediately. If you are a participant or ministry leader in any of these types of programs, please consult your ministry leader regarding any further details in light of cancellations.

**Since our Southridge Shelter provides an emergency service, it will continue to operate.** As well, our Harvest Kitchen ministry at our Welland Location remains in operation - albeit in a 'drive-thru' format! However, our church office (at our St. Catharines Location) will be closed temporarily as our staff implements a "work from home" strategy as much as possible for the sake of everyone's health and safety.

**In short: except for the Southridge Shelter and Harvest Kitchen program, all programs of Southridge Community Church will be suspended immediately to contribute to our community's efforts to contain COVID-19.**

Thankfully, though, our church has never ultimately been about programs! To our leadership, **the real questions are:** *How can we foster a lifestyle of full devotion to Jesus these days? And: what does it look like to rise up and be the church in a time like this?*

In addition to fostering a lifestyle of Inspiration through experimenting with a temporary online experience, we also think the additional steps of isolation can create opportunities to increase our intimacy with God. Instead of watching sports, spend some extra time in scripture and prayer these days. Experiment with some spiritual practices to connect with Jesus in new ways. Consider how some added time off could actually become "Game on!" with God!

As well, we feel like we can be creative in fostering a lifestyle of Connection by leveraging technology to stay connected as Life Groups, maybe even taking in the

online service together. Use extra time at home as an opportunity to have deeper-spirited conversations with roommates or as a family. Actively encourage your friends in their anxieties and check in with each other to make sure that everyone has what they need to navigate the challenges of the coming weeks. While certainly not ideal in the absence of physical togetherness, let's be deliberate to remain invested in each other's lives as a church family, albeit remotely.

And most importantly, let's express a lifestyle of Action by not shrinking back from shining the light and love of Jesus on a world increasingly desperate for Him! Instead of stockpiling, let's share generously with those in need and our surrounding neighbours. Instead of panicking over the state of our financial investments, let's reach out and make extra investments in organizations working to curb the pandemic—groups like [Red Cross](#) and [World Vision](#).

As a leadership, our bigger-picture perspective sees these days as a tremendous opportunity for us to lean into and share the Person and Work of Jesus Christ like never before. These are the days when our faith kicks in—trusting in a Jesus who said, "In this world you will have troubles. But I have overcome the world!"

The spiritual reality is that we all suffer through a pandemic that plagues our whole world called sin that ravages every single one of our lives. But thanks to Jesus, we're living on the redemptive side of history, so let's let our lives and church tell that story to a world desperate for some Good News!

On a personal note, I'm writing this communiqué from the airport in Guatemala City on our way to a family vacation in Mexico. After visiting our Compassion sponsor family on almost a yearly basis for the past decade, yesterday we had the opportunity to celebrate our sponsor daughter's Quinceanera—a Latin American girl's coming-of-age celebration at their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. I've attached a photo of our two families, bonded together through the grace of God!

This experience has been perfectly timed to help me see God's bigger picture: that God is sovereign, that God is active and that God is liberally spreading love and life-changing power, regardless of what the circumstances in front of us might look like.

In spite of a context of abject poverty, the life and love of Jesus was shining brightly in a rural town in Guatemala yesterday. And as a leadership at Southridge, we're committed to seeing that happen across Niagara in the days to come!

