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Friends,

As the FPC Coronavirus Advisory Committee, we are writing to you with best wishes and our latest perspectives on the current worldwide COVID-19 crisis. In this update, we share some of the data and observations that those of us in the medical community have been reviewing. There remain areas of uncertainty but also some good news to share.

As of April 29, there have been over 27,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Texas and almost 6000 in Harris County alone. Compared to New York, we have been spared the magnitude of disease spread and have largely avoided overwhelming the resources of our health care system in evaluating and treating patients as was feared in the early stages. Nonetheless, our health care providers are working very hard under difficult and vulnerable circumstances in every hospital in Houston. They deserve our love, support, and prayers.

To date, over 700 Texans have died of COVID-19, and additional Texans are potentially at risk based on projections from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, available [here](#). This means that our local community will continue to experience more cases and hospitalizations, albeit at a decreasing rate, over the next few weeks, even if current social distancing measures are maintained through May. Yes, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and it seems that the curve is flattening from the joint efforts of our community.

When we first learned of COVID-19, it was believed to be mainly a disease of older adults, particularly those with significant other diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and chronic heart or lung diseases. We now know that younger adults between 20-45 years of age account for at least one-third of hospital admissions. Fortunately, infants and children appear to be at a lower risk of severe disease. However, children are more likely to be asymptomatic when infected and, therefore, have increased potential to spread the disease. Thus, we need to continue to do all we can to protect everyone by continuing to physically distance ourselves from people outside our households, even from our grandchildren.

COVID-19 is transmitted both by droplets that are released with coughing or sneezing and/or by the transfer of the virus from hands to nose, mouth, or eyes after touching a contaminated object. Unfortunately, the people most likely to spread the disease are those with the mildest symptoms because they may not even be aware that they are infected. At this time, our best defense against COVID-19 is to maintain physical distancing, including avoiding all gatherings such as in-person worship, and by practicing rigorous hygiene by frequently washing our hands and avoiding touching our faces. Now, in Houston, our county judge and mayor have also recommended wearing a mask over one's mouth and nose to prevent the spread of the disease.

On April 27, Governor Abbott released his [OpenTexas report](#), which included minimum recommended health protocols for houses of worship as they reimplement in-person worship. These minimum standards include maintaining physical distancing, encouraging remote worship for vulnerable groups, disinfection of facilities, and face masks for all in attendance. We agreed with Governor Abbott when he said, “Texas is a big state, and the transmission rate of COVID-19 varies in different communities. Texans also have big hearts and should love their neighbors by evaluating the rate of local community spread to determine the appropriate level of mitigation strategies to implement.” Given that Harris County accounts for a significant portion of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Texas, local health care leaders have requested that churches continue to worship remotely during the month of May to help keep the number of new infections as low as possible. With this in mind, we believe the best course of action continues to be staying at home, for now, to gather in worship via live stream, to join the church-wide [Cover-to-Cover Bible reading initiative](#), and to utilize online technologies for other church-related group gatherings. We encourage everyone to use this opportunity to go deeper into your faith and explore prayer like never before.

We also know that everyone desires to once again come together in our church building to worship together and to sing praise to the Lord. To this end, we concur with the Session’s decision to reimplement in-person worship on May 31 and together celebrate Pentecost Sunday and the birthday of the Church. During the month of May, we will continue to monitor the epidemiologic data closely as Texas slowly reopens and assess additional guidance from public health and government leaders as it becomes available. We also will be carefully planning our health protocols to allow a responsible reopening that is as safe as possible for all. We realize that the situation may change and a surge of new infections could lead us to further delay restarting in-person worship, so we should all continue to be prayerful and hopeful, but patient and humble in light of this global pandemic.

So, is there any basis for hope? Although there is no way to know when a vaccine or effective medications will be available to prevent and treat this infection, the marshaling of resources and brilliant minds nationally and internationally in this effort is unprecedented. We also do not know if and how strong immunity derived from having had COVID-19 will occur and for how long. Our long-standing clinical experience with other viruses gives the expectation that some immune protection is likely. Vaccine development is occurring at record speed, and we have to be cautiously optimistic about its availability in the future. Let us continue to pray for wisdom and unity for our political leaders and a renewed desire to work together to do best by the citizens.

Thank you for your continued support and perseverance during this time.

**Robert Moore, M.D.**

Clerk of Session

**FPC Coronavirus Advisory Team**

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