

March 14, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As events surrounding the COVID-19 virus have rapidly caused many changes in the world, specifically in regards to Church worship and activity, I hope you can agree with me that the Lord is in charge and has been preparing His Prophet and people for these times. My intent in writing this letter is to share with you direction from our Prophet and Apostles and Stake President. I love and sustain these fine brethren and know that they consult with the Lord regularly. Much of this information you may already know, but some of it you may not. Remember that this is a fluid situation and additional or modified direction will be forthcoming as necessary. I encourage you to regularly check the Church's website churchofjesuschrist.org and the ward website mwcward.org for updated information. The second part of this document will contain a summary of what we know and have received so far as well as suggestions for home-centered gospel study and worship.

To begin I want to express my thoughts on the nature of what we are experiencing at this time. Prophets have foretold perilous times and calamities and plagues preceding the return of the Savior. There are many other signs (not all are scary!) that have passed or are yet to come. I believe that this current event is an opportunity to examine how well we are aligned with Christ's teachings and to learn and improve in areas we are lacking. In the parlance of our times, this is a 'wake-up call'. I do not mean to minimize the suffering or loss of life, but I think that God is giving us a severe warning – just like He has done with other nations and peoples in the past. We will be wise to heed the warnings. I am reminded of the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

First the temporal aspect – have we followed Church leaders' admonitions to prepare ourselves temporally for times like this? For decades, the Church has given us instruction and means to do so. Let us make the sacrifices necessary to prepare ourselves with the necessities to sustain life (and maybe a bit of comfort as well :) Bro. Brett Conner is currently called as a Ward Self-Reliance Specialist for Emergency Preparedness and has expressed a willingness to teach members how to prepare for emergencies and disasters. You can also search for 'Food Storage' on the church website and read ideas on how to prepare methodically, practically, and frugally for times of want. Remember, to the Lord all things are spiritual and the temporal aspects of our lives are directly connected to our spirituality.

Second and more important - how is our relationship with Jesus Christ? Are we striving to live the covenants we made at baptism? Are we seeking to enter the temple to make the covenants required for exaltation? Are we striving to live the covenants already made in the temple? This can also be viewed as a test of our discipleship – will we remain faithful in Sabbath Day observance without others watching? From Moses 1:39 we learn that Heavenly Father desires all His children to inherit eternal life. However, we have to be willing to make the necessary covenants and sacrifices to qualify for this ultimate gift. Please take some time to prayerfully consider what you can do to strengthen your testimony, improve your relationship with Jesus Christ, and serve Him and His children.

Third – this is an amazing opportunity for families to become closer together. It is a wonderful chance for parents and children to learn together at home. Many Priesthood holders will also get to

administer the Sacrament to their families and others where before they did not enjoy that opportunity. So embrace these times, be wise, do not fear, but have joy!

I want to share my testimony that God lives, Jesus is the Christ, the Holy Ghost is available to us as a guide and comfort as long as we stay worthy to feel His influence. We have everything we need to not only survive spiritually but to thrive and be truly happy if we will study the scriptures, heed the words of our Church leaders, and follow the Spirit.

C. Eldon Wagner

Bishop

Midwest City Ward

Guidelines and suggestions for home-centered worship

Sunday home-centered worship

The father presides over meetings in the home. When a father is not present, the mother presides. Presiding in the case of home worship means ensuring proper administration of the sacrament when performed, selecting speakers/lessons/topics, ensuring proper atmosphere for worship and learning, and directing the meeting by the Spirit.

Please remember that the home should be as sacred a place as the temple. We worship God on the Sabbath, regardless of location. As such, it is recommended that attire and behavior be such that shows God our respect and love for Him and His Only Begotten Son.

The bishop has authorized worthy Priesthood holders to administer the sacrament in their homes weekly. Priests or Melchizedek Priesthood holders may prepare, bless, and pass, teachers may prepare and pass, deacons may pass. Please review section 18.9.3 in the General Handbook for directions on performing the ordinance. Note that in the absence of unbroken bread, an unbroken cracker or other clean food may be used. A clean plate and clean cups may be used in place of trays. A clean, white cloth/towel may be used as a cover, though this is not required for the ordinance. Please find the sacramental prayers in D&C 20:77-79, remember to use 'water' instead of 'wine'. Priesthood holders should not be forced to exercise their Priesthood nor shamed if they do not wish to do so. If anyone has questions as to their worthiness to administer, please contact the bishop for guidance. Further questions should be directed to your ministering brethren.

It is acceptable to have small groups (i.e. friends, extended families) gather together for worship. However, nobody should feel obligated to invite others nor should anyone feel obligated to participate at someone else's home. Please use wisdom and remember we are trying to prevent the spread of disease.

Members who desire to partake but without access to Priesthood holders in their home will be served the sacrament once a month, per directions from the First Presidency. The Elders Quorum, Aaronic Priesthood quorums, and Relief Society organizations will arrange this service in the coming week(s). Please do not solicit sacrament administration from brethren, however feel free to accept an invitation for administration.

Talks – feel free to invite members of the family to prepare and share talks on an assigned topic. Starting next week, topics will be posted on the ward website that you may use if desired. Help children, youth, and those new in the gospel learn how to prepare and present a talk.

Please consider using the *Come Follow Me For Individuals and Families* resource book for gospel study. However, you may also study topics that you feel are especially needful for your situation. Please teach children, youth and those new in the gospel how to prepare and instruct a lesson. The presiding person may invite each member of your family to share testimony as he feels appropriate. Family councils may also be considered in addition to worship and study time.

Please check the ward website 'Org' tab for postings on lessons from Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, RS/EQ leaders, etc. These are meant to support your own study, not replace it.

Guidelines for meetings and other items

All worship services, meetings, and activities normally held at the building

Canceled until further notice

Baptisms, weddings, funerals

These services are permitted, but only close family, and those deemed necessary will attend. Requests for a small number of other individuals will be considered on a case by case basis.

Welfare/spiritual guidance

Please contact the ward executive secretary for an appointment with the bishop as normal. The storehouse is still open for use by those authorized by the bishop.

Seminary

Canceled until further notice

Full-time missionaries

Dinner appointments are still allowed. Missionaries are required to keep a distance of 3 feet from others; no hand-shaking. They are still allowed to proselyte and teach lessons.

Ward missionaries

Please continue to serve, but use similar precautions as those used by full-time missionaries.

Ministering

Continue ministering and serving as normal (or better :)

Church cleaning

Canceled until further notice

Family Home Evening

Continues as usual – learn, grow closer, and have fun!

Unofficial gatherings

That's up to you, but use wisdom and follow the Spirit

Tithing

Please pay your tithing and other offerings online. If you need help setting this up, please seek assistance from your ministering brethren/sisters first. Bishopric and a clerk will be available at the church from 10 – 10:30 AM on Sundays to accept it for those who cannot or do not wish to do so. We will also provide envelopes so you can mail your tithing to the bishop.

Temple service

All temples are currently closed for proxy ordinances until further notice. Living ordinances may be scheduled following the normal procedures. Contact the ward executive secretary for an interview with the Bishop as a first step. The stake presidency will give us direction regarding temple recommend renewal interviews soon.

Stay connected with each other using the Gospel Living App!

Ward executive secretary – Clayton Garner – phone is in LDS tools – please text and he will contact you as soon as he can.