

November 19th, 2020

Dear Soma Eastside Church,

As you are undoubtedly aware, the state of Washington has asked us to take further precautions because of increased cases of Covid-19. <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/>

Therefore Soma, I encourage you to the best of your ability - to follow the government's recommendations. I think that spirit fits very well with Romans 13. I also strongly encourage you to follow Romans 14 as well - do not judge your fellow believers that have different convictions about how to respond to this pandemic.

Since March of this year we have, out of love for our fellow citizens, voluntarily followed the government guidelines for our gatherings, to the best of our ability.

The new restrictions still allow us to meet, but asks us to not sing while we gather. I will encourage you to follow this, to the best of your ability. Instead of singing while we gather I will encourage you to speak the words quietly, or simply assume an attitude of prayer - perhaps bow your head, raise your hands, or kneel in worship. We have a long tradition in our country of singing loudly, and many of us love the concert of praise that is offered to our worthy God. However, we can worship Him with raised hands, and bowed heads and hearts, and whispered words. What is important right now is that we continue to meet in limited small group settings, continue to proclaim the Gospel, and continue to worship.

Truthfully, the medical community is united on some things and divided on others in regard to the virus. As I consider carefully how to lead Soma during this time I am reading a wide range of scientific opinion on the matter. Some of the doctors that I respect believe that we should all be quarantined in our homes. Others, considered leaders in their fields, believe that the virus is serious and that we should take some precautions, but that we should not ignore what lockdowns do to our mental and physical health, our kids' education, our neighbors jobs, and our marriages.

While I am not a virus expert, I am a spiritual and mental health worker. I see in many of you suffering from stress, depression, deteriorated health, marital trouble, and other predictable results of prolonged isolation. God tells us in his word to *not forsake meeting together*. We should definitely continue to meet - whether that is online or in-person. Please consider this, however, if online only is causing you to suffer spiritually, than you should consider putting on a mask and joining one of our gatherings. **I know that I would like to see you monthly** (unless you are of advanced age, or have a serious illness already, or caring for someone who does) **so that I can look you in the eye and see that you are ok.**

Most of all, brothers and sisters, remember that *God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind*. Live a life of love towards others. Honor the Lord above all, follow his commands, and extend love and grace to your fellow believers, and those who do not yet know Jesus. Even if this virus was twice as deadly I would urge you to not live in fear.

I sincerely hope to see you Sunday at 10 at Bellevue Way Community Church. I will be preaching on Esther 8. Robyn Volk will be singing, and we will all be praying together.

I love and miss you all,

Pastor Paul

