



Letter to Pastors

March 20, 2020

Dear Florida District Pastors,

We are certainly living and leading in unprecedented times. It seems like each day brings a new leadership reality. In the middle of all this, I've been inspired by your innovation and imagination as you've sought ways to adapt to this new reality, enabling the work of the church to move forward on mission.

I want you to know that I'm thankful for your partnership in ministry and that I'm praying for the Holy Spirit to empower you with wisdom, strength, and peace.

Wednesday afternoon I participated in a video conference with the Southeast Region District Superintendents and our Jurisdictional General Superintendent, Dr. David Busic. The scope of our conversation was focused on providing guidance to churches as to public gatherings, reporting, conducting business in the light of governmental limits on gathering, and as you might guess...District Assemblies.

The Board of General Superintendents has sent an overview of their recommendations and you should have received it earlier today. In the event you did not receive it, I am also attaching it [here](#) to this email. Please be sure to read it carefully and in its entirety. Additionally, they will be sending a weekly COVID19 update via [Nazarene Communications Network News](#), be sure to sign up for this if you're not already.

1. REGARDING GATHERINGS, THE BGS HAS RECOMMENDED THE FOLLOWING...

1. That local churches follow their national government's recommendations regarding gatherings throughout our current health crisis.
2. That local churches then follow direction as given by the District Advisory Board of their district.
3. Finally, that churches follow CDC and local health officials' guidance for their particular context, as each community in our denomination will be impacted differently and a contextualized response if important.

In keeping with these recommendations, **the Florida District is advising all congregations to honor the President's 15 Day COVID-19 Response Plan**

and to avoid gathering in groups of more than 10 people for the next two weeks (until April 1st) or until different guidance is given, and to follow the CDC's recommendations for Religions Organizations.

This creates an opportunity for innovative and creative ways of gathering, preaching, providing spiritual formation and pastoral care, and serving our communities. Many churches are embracing utilizing technology like Facebook Live, YouTube, Zoom and other online tools. Some are holding "drive-in" theater style church services, negotiating free radio time on local stations, and other innovative approaches. Whatever you do, see this as an opportunity to for the church to be the church as it should be, caring for others, sharing our resources, and meeting real needs in our community.

2. REGARDING REPORTING ATTENDANCE, THE BGS HAS RECOMMENDED REMOVING THE REQUIREMENT FOR REPORTING ATTENDANCE, BUT NOT FOR MONTHLY REPORTING, DURING OUR CURRENT CRISIS...

Each district has been asked to develop their own monthly report for the next few months. You will find a link to our [monthly Ministry Accountability Report here](#). You will also receive this link in the Vital Signs email you receive each month from the District Resource Center.

3. THE BGS HAS ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT DISTRICT OFFICES FOCUS ON FUNCTIONING AS DISTRICT RESOURCE CENTERS...

Thankfully, this is already a strategy that the Florida District Resource Center has embraced and we are working hard to make sure that you are resourced well, not only in this current crisis, but well after the crisis has passed.

Here are just a few of the ways that we are resourcing pastors and congregations currently...

- Updating our [website](#) with a list of COVID-19 response resources
- Making ourselves available to support you with personal guidance through this crisis
- Making ourselves available to assist in working with lenders in the event you need to advocate for modifying mortgages as you navigate the current crisis
- Providing access to crisis and emergency support
- Providing a weekly email from myself (Three Thought Thursday) with helpful resources and tools
- Hosting twice per week [Pastors Happy Hour Zoom](#) calls for equipping and connection on Mondays and Thursdays at 4pm (15 minutes of equipping, 15 minutes of sharing best practices, and 30 minutes for our District Pastors to connect) for the next 4 weeks (today Pastors Happy Hour archive [click here](#)).
- Providing access to free Counseling services for Pastors and their families, through [Care for Pastors](#) and the [Center for Pastoral Health at Trevecca Nazarene University](#)

I want to personally encourage each pastor to continue to honor the Sabbath as you lead through this crisis. In times like this it's easy to find yourself running on adrenaline, and while that's helpful in a crisis, it leads to a severe crash once the crisis passes. To mitigate against this, the practice of Sabbath is essential. Take time to walk, run, and move outside each day. Practice times of daily reading and

rest. Maintain a healthy diet, and regular sleep patterns as much as possible.

Additionally, I want to encourage you to take advantage of the resources available through Care for Pastors and the Center for Pastoral Health. Don't wait until the end of the crisis to connect with a mental health professional to assist you in navigating these challenging days.

FINALLY, I NEED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT IN CONSULTATION WITH OUR JURISDICTIONAL GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT, WE HAVE MADE THE DIFFICULT DECISION TO CANCEL THIS YEAR'S DISTRICT ADVANCE.

As you might have guessed, the date for our District Assembly falls in the window of the current CDC recommendations which limit gatherings to 50 people, and that gathering for an assembly will not be possible. This is the reality for any District Assembly scheduled for April and early May, so we are not the only District who will be taking this action.

While we could conduct business virtually (per Manual 204); with the potential for technical and translation challenges, the lack of reliable internet access in some locations, the potential for uncounted votes given these challenges, the ever changing national and health recommendations, and the potential that we may see a "Shelter in place" order in one of our major metropolitan areas (see San Francisco, Portland, and now the states of California and Illinois); this is an unlikely and risky option.

A second option, and one that most District Advisory Committees and Jurisdictional General Superintendents are approving is to publish all reports digitally, making them available to pastors and delegates, and to allow the District Advisory Committee to conduct the regular business of the assembly. Our District Advisory Committee will be meeting to make this decision this weekend, and an update will be sent to pastors and congregations early next week.

As you've read in the letter from the BGS, the BGS has placed a 30 day travel moratorium on General Superintendent's travel, and we have no idea if this will be lifted after 30 days. Because of this and the existing limits on gatherings, our Ordination service will also be impacted and **we are working with Dr. Busic on finding a time to reschedule this year's Ordination service.** This might be the most difficult part of this whole decision for me personally, as I cannot imagine missing out on an ordination service. Be praying that we'll be able to find a workable date for rescheduling this service.

Knowing what we know, pastors, **please communicate to your delegates and guests to the Assembly, that they should cancel their hotel and travel plans which had been made for April 24-25, 2020.** There should be no penalty for canceling hotel reservations if reservations were made at a district recommended hotel.

Pastors, I so covet your prayers for our churches in these days. While they are days of great challenge, they are also days of great opportunity. This current disruption is driving a level of innovation, imagination, and collaboration within our churches that is unlike any I've seen in my 20+ years of serving in the Church of the Nazarene.

I hold on to the words of Joseph from Genesis 50 as it relates to how God is at work in our current circumstances.

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is

now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20

Yes Lord, make it so!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale Schaeffer".

Rev. Dale W. Schaeffer || District Superintendent

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