

Greetings Church Family –

This has been an interesting season for all of us, that is for sure. I don't think any of us could have imagined at the beginning of the year what was to come and that reminds us that we don't know the future. And that ought to call us yet again to place our trust in the Lord who knows and controls the future – He declares the end from the beginning (check out Isaiah 46:9-10). With that in mind – it's time for me to write a note with some updates to help answer some questions we've been getting and to clarify a few things as well. With that said we need to remember the message of James 4:13-16 (ESV) – “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” We all always need to remember that all of our plans always are ‘If the Lord wills...’ plans.

That said most of you are probably aware that the COVID numbers and hospitalizations in our area and across all of Iowa are up dramatically over the past couple of weeks. Many of you are also no-doubt aware that churches and other organizations are responding in different ways to seek to lovingly protect people during this time. We want to make sure that you are aware of the public health conditions in our community and we want you to make the best decision for you and your family regarding attending worship services and other ministry events here at our church. Please don't feel any pressure to attend if you are uncomfortable, we're continuing to offer our online option and we so appreciate all of you who have been faithfully tracking with us online throughout the past months! If you are looking for us – search Arthur Evangelical Free Church on Facebook and YouTube.

For those of us who are planning to attend ‘in person’ worship services and other gatherings here at Arthur E-Free over the next couple of weeks here are a few things to consider. Governor Reynolds this past week has issued several new requirements / mandates requiring mask use and social distancing at many indoor gatherings. And that has brought up some questions that have made their way here to the church office – at this point churches are not included in these new restrictions out of a respect for religious liberty. That said – Ida County Public Health reached out to several churches (us included) this past week and they are asking us to wear masks and be careful to socially distance. So here's the plan at this time - after discussion with the elders we are not mandating mask use but we are asking everyone to thoughtfully consider the requests of Ida County Public Health. We want you to be aware of what has been requested and we'll ask you to make the decision – if the state legal requirements change we'll keep you updated.

On Sunday morning please remember to show some renewed attention to spreading out between family groups as best we can. Let's also be sure to considerately provide extra spacing for those who desire it at all times and especially when we're entering and exiting the sanctuary. Thanks for being understanding and flexible.

Some of you have asked for my own rational – so speaking for myself (this is just me, Pastor Dave) here is how I weigh these issues. That said – I'll begin saying this is probably the strangest challenge I've faced since entering vocational ministry in 2008 – these circumstances

are certainly confusing and I'm sure we all feel that. All of that said – I'd personally be the first to admit that I find wearing masks to be a little annoying (a minor inconvenience, really) but I plan to wear a mask except when preaching probably for the remainder of November. I see this as a way of showing respect and love for our health care workers who are saying that we need to slow down the spread of the virus to maintain health care capacity. I'm willing to 'give it a try' and I personally figure that if every other indoor gathering of more than 25 people in the state is required to have everyone in masks – I'll go ahead and put one on too and be thankful and praise God that religious liberty is being respected. As you decide what is right for you to do I'm simply going to suggest that each of us to ask – How can I personally love God supremely and my neighbor sacrificially during this unusual time? I'm okay with us coming to different answers when it comes to disputable matters. I'd just ask that we personally ask and answer that question. This is Mark 12:30-31 (ESV) – “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” We all ought to always be asking that question – How can I personally love God supremely and my neighbor sacrificially?

Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone)

Pastor Dave