



ANG MO KIO METHODIST CHURCH (TRAC)

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First Pastoral Letter to the Ang Mo Kio Methodist Church Family on the Covid-19 Situation (18 Feb 2020)

(By Rev Anthony Lee, Pastor-in-Charge)

Dear Family and Friends of AMKMC (TRAC),

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

This week many church leaders and pastors had to make a difficult decision as to whether to suspend worship services or not. We are indeed going through testing times as a nation as well as a Church. On one hand, we want to be socially responsible. On the other hand, we know how important expression of one's faith is. Various churches have made their own calls and we need to respect each other's decision is what's best for their members.

For us here at AMKMC, I believe it is necessary for you to know why we chose to continue with our worship services. (I am aware that some of you have received your fair share of criticisms from well-meaning family and friends too.) On 14 Feb 2020, our Minister of Health met and briefed the various Heads of Churches (where our Bishop was in attendance). In brief, **our Minister of Health advises that worship services may continue, but with appropriate precautionary measures.** (cf. Press release from the Ministry of Health (MOH) on 14 Feb 2020: <https://tinyurl.com/udho6iy>.)

In response to our Minister of Health's advisory, the Methodist Church in Singapore, led by our Bishop and Presidents from our three Annual Conferences (CAC, ETAC and TRAC), have decided that, as a Methodist Church, we will not suspend our worship services but **should continue** as long as we have the necessary precautionary measures in place and are not directed by MOH to do otherwise. If it helps, the statement by the National Council of Churches can be found at <https://nccs.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/COVID-19-Update.pdf>. We are reminded from Scriptures in **Hebrews 13:17 (NIV): "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."**

In addition, I wish to assure you that our pastors, staff, and leaders have worked very hard and taken all the necessary precautionary measures to keep our congregation safe without having to compromise our need to exercise our faith in God to worship Him as a family. These precautionary measures include, but are not limited to:

- Constant reminders for worshippers who are unwell should rest at home, and for everyone to practise good personal hygiene and avoid touching their mouth, eyes and nose with their hands
- Increased frequency of cleaning of classrooms and common areas, such as washrooms, lift panels according to enhanced NEA guidelines
- Temperature screening and declaration before entry into church premises
- Contact tracing of all worshippers who attended (including the rooms/pews they are seated)
- Provision of hand sanitizers at lift lobby
- Cancellation of after service refreshments to eliminate chances of contamination through food
- Use of non-contact forms of greeting are used, such as the traditional Asian greeting

- Modification of collection of tithes and offerings so that offering bags are not passed along
- Encouraging the use of E-bulletin
- Decentralizing of children and youth into smaller groups
- Provision of online streaming of services
- Implementation of Office Continuity Plans progressively from 17 Feb 2020

As for ministry events and cell groups, the general instruction from me is to continue unless otherwise advised. Certainly, ministry heads and cell leaders have some discretion to make certain judgement calls on the ground but as Bishop has shared in his sermon on 16 Feb 2020, the regular meeting of Christians is the hallmark of Methodism. It is my desire that cell groups continue to meet regularly, and if need be, tap on the use of technology. At the very least, there must be concerted efforts to pray with each other over the phone for such a time as this. As good Methodists, we must always be willing to step out of comfort zones to minister to those in need and those who minister to others (e.g. those in medical professions or frontline officers), and not merely think of our own self-interests.

This is a season of deep self-examination, testing, and prayer for the church in Singapore. Yet, as the Chinese words 危机 teach us, there is an opportunity in every crisis. There is no better season to let our faith shine than when the world is crippled by fear and self-preservation.

My purpose in writing this pastoral letter to you is not for you to refute in defiance to those who question church leaders' decisions. As **Colossians 4:6 (NIV)** reminds us, **"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."** Rather, I wish to provide you with assurance that we – the church (and kindergarten) – take our disinfection duties and precautionary measures very seriously. We are not being socially irresponsible and flippant when we decide to continue our (kindergarten and) worship services. At the same time, we recognize there will be people who may not feel comfortable to be part of a crowd, and so we have provided online channels for you to continue to participate in worship. By providing this online streaming channel, we are by no means encouraging individualistic or consumeristic worship. This is a needed measure for this season.

I end with a quote by A. W. Tozer, **"God never uses anyone greatly until He tests them deeply,"** and a quote from **Romans 5:2b–5 (NIV)**, **"And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."**

It is after a life of testing that enabled Wesley to boldly testify at the end of his life, **"The best of all is, God is with us."** May we also be found faithful in this testing and so, experience God's peace and presence.

Yours Sincerely,



Rev Anthony Lee