

To churches throughout the UK, and their leaders,

We are writing this open letter to raise concerns shared by many Christians and church members throughout the country, about each local church's commitment to worshipping God, to sharing the gospel, to fellowship among Christians, and to providing for the many needs that the church should meet, during this ongoing crisis. Across the country it appears there are many churches that are struggling, or even neglecting to fulfil these callings, and we earnestly desire to draw attention to their importance. We plead with each church and its leaders to fulfil these callings in faith, and not to let them be undermined, even in the most difficult circumstances. Whilst making these pleas, we also plead with all brothers and sisters to submit to one another in love, "counting others more significant than yourselves."

- **First**, we ask each church to consider if they are placing the worship of God first in everything, even where it is most difficult to do so. Video-calling can be a blessing to the church, but it cannot replace the physical gathering of the body of Christ in one place, which we are exhorted to do in the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:25), and which Christ assures us of his spiritual presence at such communal gatherings (Matthew 18:20). We ask, therefore, whether the desire to meet physically is an urgent priority for each church, and are steps being taken to ensure it takes place?
- **Second**, we ask each church to consider if they are praying earnestly for both our deliverance from, and our faithfulness in, this crisis, as we are taught to do in numerous places in the Bible (e.g. 1 Kings 8:37-40; 2 Chronicles 20:9). Is the church stirred up to pray as much as possible, and to faithfully do God's work in every way possible, in this crisis (Acts 4:23-31)?
- **Third**, we plead for those churches that are closed to consider the great and often hidden costs of not meeting particularly, in those areas where meeting together is essential to honouring scripture, God, and every person. These include:
  - **Gospel and worship:** The absence of the best and normal means God has ordained for His worship, and for the proclaiming of the gospel (Psalm 95:1-3).
  - **Fellowship:** The removal of the only opportunity for true fellowship during a time where household mixing is illegal (Acts 2:42).
  - **Accountability:** The removal of clear accountability to each other in our walk with God, which meeting in person provides (Galatians 6:1).
  - **Burdens upon Christians:** The placing of a heavy burden on Christians, many of whom would otherwise not have chosen it – a burden of loneliness and of needs unrecognised owing to the lack of fellowship (Galatians 6:2).
  - **Hospitality:** The cessation of hospitality to strangers, which, whilst needing balancing with the protection of health, is a biblical calling to the church, and often a vital meeting of needs for strangers (Romans 12:13).
  - **Pastoral care:** The inadequacy of providing pastoral care to God's people when not meeting face to face (1 Peter 5:13).
  - **The public:** the removal of access to the community of faith for those outside of the church (Romans 10:14-15).

- **Fourth**, to churches that are open, we ask them to consider whether they are meeting the above needs fully and faithfully, and prioritising both the worship of God, and the needs of their worshippers, above the letter of the government guidance.
- **Fifth**, we ask all churches to consider whether they are respecting the value of each worshipper:
  - Are big decisions prayed over with, discussed with, and made in service of the whole church - such as whether to close the building, to restrict fellowship, to mandate masks, or the question of singing? Church leaders are ultimately responsible for, and accountable for, such decisions, but are they taken in consultation with the views of worshippers, and after much congregational prayer?
  - To churches whose buildings are closed, is your leadership providing for those members who feel a calling and a need to meet in person, such as by making your buildings available to small groups of worshippers, or co-ordinating with other churches?
  - Are church leaders working with their worshippers to maximise opportunities for in-person fellowship, such as outside walks or visits to those in need?
- **Sixth**, we ask all churches in the country whether their messaging is helping others come to a balanced view of this crisis, a view which takes into account not only safety, but the interests of worshipping God, and other spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs?
- **Seventh and finally**, we ask all churches whether they are truly exhorting people, both Christians and non-Christians, to overcome their fears through trust in God as our shelter (Psalm 91), the overcoming of death through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3), and the promise of victory over death leading to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

We, the signed, greet the wider church, and pray that this letter will help, stir up, and encourage each church.