

## Seventh Pastoral Letter to the Wesley Church Family on the Covid-19 Situation (09 Apr 2020)

(By Rev Stanley Chua, Pastor-in-Charge)



**Dear Friends and Members of the Wesley family,**

I am writing again to update all of you regarding the latest “Circuit Breaker” measures that were announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 3 April 2020. As our PM has explained, these “Circuit Breaker” measures aim to significantly reduce the risk of a big outbreak occurring as well as to stem the tide of Covid-19 cases. These “Circuit Breaker” measures that took effect from 7 Apr 2020 include the closure of most workplaces, except for essential services and key economic sectors. A day after our Prime Minister spoke, we received an advisory from MCCY (Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth) to all religious organisations. Two advisory segments have relevance for us:

### **1. Advisory on Live Streaming Worship Services**

The MCCY advisory has clarified that our online streaming services are regarded as essential services and we are permitted to continue such services for our church members. However, the stricter measures state, “...the activities and the people involved in implementing these alternatives must be kept to only what is essential (e.g. filming a sermon only without a worship team or band), and for as short a duration as possible. Precautionary measures must also be taken...”

The only permitted essential service with this new stricter advisory will be the sermon recording which will be done in Church. We will pre-record at home all the other segments of our worship for both our Traditional and Prayer & Praise Services. These home recordings will be done mostly by our worship ministry pastoral staff for easy facilitation as well as to comply with the stricter measures of avoiding socialising with others beyond our own household. All these recordings will then be ‘stitched’ together into a full worship service. So please do not be surprised if you find that our online worship services appear disjointed or have different backgrounds.

### **2. Advisory on Religious Gatherings**

During this “Circuit Breaker” period, the authorities have made it very clear that “religious leaders are to strongly advise their followers **not to hold religious gatherings in private settings, except with family members in the same household.**” With this new tightened advisory, we appeal to all of you to assist us in complying with it. Please ensure that we cease all physical meetings for our Small Groups and Bible Study Groups. Importantly, we need to ensure that during this “Circuit Breaker” period, we do not gather physically in each other’s homes to worship on Sundays except with our own household members. We are issuing these instructions not only because of the authorities’ warning that “persons and organisations that do not comply will face stiff penalties under the Infectious Diseases Act.” More importantly, we are encouraging all of you to live out our Lord’s commandment to love our neighbours by playing our part to stamp out this Covid-19 pandemic. In so doing, we can help stand in solidarity with all our fellow Singaporeans.

### **3. Other Pastoral Concerns**

#### **a. Hearts Amiss**

Since the authorities suspended all religious worship services and gatherings, I have come to understand and empathise in a real way with how the Apostle Paul must have felt for the Churches when he was not able to meet with them personally for worship and fellowship. The Apostle Paul really missed his brothers and sisters in-Christ whenever he was apart from them. Although God had gifted Paul as a wonderful writer, Paul's preference had always been to have face to face meetings with his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. For example, 1 Thessalonians 2:17 (ESV) "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face..." Or, Romans 1:11-12 (ESV) "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you..." In similar ways, this is what I have been feeling for all of you ever since our worship services and gatherings had been suspended due to these necessary Covid-19 measures that our government has implemented. I guess you can say, if there is anything good that the Covid-19 has done for me, it is that it has made me aware of how much our Wesley community means to me.

I am sure I am not the only one feeling this way as I believe many of you do too, especially our pastors and leaders. In fact, we (our pastors, leaders and I) have been brainstorming on how else we could encourage all of us to keep connected with each other in the absence of physical meetings. We are still brainstorming but one immediate idea that we came up with is prayer. We are reminded by the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (NIV) "...pray continually...for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Indeed, I am reminded that prayer can transcend time and physical boundaries to keep us connected not only with God but with each other. Importantly, we can play our part to intercede for God's mercy to be upon our world and all of us as we battle against this Covid-19 pandemic. With this, our pastors and leaders have decided to dedicate every Wednesday from next week onwards for a time of Church-Wide synchronised prayer.

#### **b. Church-Wide Synchronised Prayer**

Starting next Wednesday (15 Apr 2020) from 8.30pm to 9pm, we are encouraging every Wesleyan home to connect with your Small Groups, Bible Study Groups or whatever small groups that you belong to, to come together for just half an hour to pray via video conferencing (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.). If you do not belong to any small group, you can also call two other friends from Wesley and join us in prayer on that day and during that half an hour. If you wish for us to assist you to be connected to a Small Group, you can contact Pastor Gladwin Lee or any of our Small Group Ministry Pastoral Staff (Wong Ee Hwee, Gerhardine Foo or Kayyona Lim)\*. I believe God will be very pleased and glorified if we have every Wesleyan praying together in various parts of our nation. From our Church, every Wednesday, we will lead by issuing out three brief prayer pointers for all of us to pray at the said hour. We hope you will join us in this endeavour of prayer so that we can continue to be united in our spirits and uphold one another as well as our nation and world during this Covid-19 pandemic. We will issue more details through our Wesley website and Wesley's Telegram channel so please look out for it. (\*Please use this link [wesleymc.org/joinsg](https://wesleymc.org/joinsg).)

#### **c. Holy Communion**

The final issue that I need to address is the matter of Holy Communion. I am sure most of you have read the Episcopal letter that our Bishop and Presidents issued on 28 March 2020 to suspend the practice of Holy Communion in all our Methodist Churches during this period. I have received reports that some of you are still enquiring as to why we cannot administer

Holy Communion online. All I can say is that our theology informs our practice. This Covid-19 pandemic has simply brought to the fore many theological issues particularly for traditional denominational Churches in an unprecedented way and there are no easy solutions. Every solution will have its challenges and have the potential to polarise and split our Church. Bearing this in mind, I appeal to you to remember two things.

- i. **Remember that we are all under authority.** We are commanded from Scriptures to obey our appointed leaders. Our Bishop and Presidents have already given their directive on Holy Communion so let us obey them. 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.”
- ii. **Remember that Holy Communion does not save us.** Bear in the mind that the centrality of the Gospel is that we are justified by faith and saved by grace in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Everything else that we do henceforth including the participation in Holy Communion is out of our faithfulness to Christ. We are not saved by participating in Holy Communion.

As I bring my letter to a close, I wish to remind all of us that most of us can endure sickness (Covid-19 included particularly), financial stress, even failure if only there are friends who will stand by us, people who will understand and empathise. But when people are cold, indifferent, or antagonistic, life can be nearly impossible to manage. So, in these trying times, may I encourage all of us to continue to find ways as the Spirit of God leads us to love and care for one another. I end now with these words from the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:1-2 (NASB) “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

To God be the glory! Amen!

Yours-in-Christ,



Pastor Stanley Chua

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