

Coronavirus: A Sobering Truth

Adam J. Richardson, Jr.
Senior Bishop
African Methodist Episcopal Church

COVID-19 is not a hoax. The virus cares nothing about having a passport at the border. It will not respect the protocol for obtaining a visa. It leaps oceans and skips from continent to continent. It is indiscriminate about who it attacks: muscle-bound professional athletes and the vulnerable aged with pre-existing conditions, and so many others in between. A great many of our members are not only counted among the faithful, they are also among the very vulnerable. The latest data, however, reveals that no one is exempt; children have also tested positive.

As the Church, then, we will do the right thing, not by coercion of a marshal mandate enforced by an officer of the government, but by moral suasion; for the good of the order. We are motivated by the unfathomable grace of God, our love for humanity, believing that it is right to do right. It is reasonable and intelligent.

Out of a spirit of love, the last thing we want to do is to expose our people, our community, to sickness and potential death. The collateral damage would be to expose the church to the expenses associated with an unnecessary lawsuit. Remember, not even Jesus took the devil's dare to leap from a pinnacle to prove the assertion of Psalm 91 that "angels would break his fall, lest he might hurt his foot on a stone." It is a psalm that interestingly also speaks of plague and pestilence.

Thus, in light of the very real threat of COVID-19, the coronavirus — dangerously contagious — it is the position of the Bishop that AME Church congregations in the Eleventh Episcopal District should take every precaution to protect the health and safety of our members, friends and the general public. We should do so by:

1. Remaining closed for regular worship services, with gatherings of no more than the recommended number of participants per community;
2. Making the attempt to utilize electronic platforms for Virtual Worship experiences: Prayer Meetings; Bible Discovery; via Streaming, Zoom, Skype, Tele-conferencing, or some other platforms for engagement and interaction. Offerings can be sent through the mail, by wire transfer, or other electronic means;
3. Utilizing innovative techniques and strategies for teaching and fellowship without physical touch;
4. Observing all recommended mandates of state and local health officials;
5. Following the guidelines for hygiene as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.CDC.gov). I refer to these guidelines as, "The gospel according to the CDC."

These are extraordinary times, requiring extraordinary means to minister to the people we have been called to serve. For the time being, this is our new normal. We are limited only by the size of our imaginations. The doors of the church are still *virtually* open!