



The Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

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E te whānau o te Karaiti o te Hāhi Weteriana
We greet you in the name of Christ,

In faith, not fear

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

John 13: 34-35 (NRSV)

Following yesterday's announcement by the Prime Minister, we are writing to inform you of the actions being undertaken by the Methodist Church of New Zealand to ensure we are all cared for during this time. Please know that you and your families are in our prayers.

Some times it feels like news updates are coming every few minutes. When we give so much of our attention to events beyond our control we can lose sight of the power we still do have. We can choose how we respond to our circumstances and perhaps even more important, in the midst of those circumstances we can choose how we treat others.

We are reminded about the time that Jesus disciples were afraid their boat might sink, but then he calmed the storm. Just like Jesus's disciples we are all in the same boat with Jesus, but we are also in it with each other and we can choose to encourage one another, to support each other, to love each other and to point each other back to Jesus during this difficult time.

New Zealand is currently facing an unprecedented situation and it is by prayer, kindness and working together that we will get through this. We need not hoard, we need not cower in fear. We need to keep good hygiene habits, we need to keep our social distance from each other. We need to look out for each other and discover new ways of being in community with each other.

Medical student Emmy Yang wrote an article for *Christianity Today* entitled **Is It Faithful to Flee an Epidemic? What Martin Luther Teaches Us About Coronavirus**, The German reformer's pastoral reflection on the plague can guide everyone during this time.

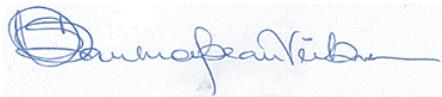
In 1527, the black plague—which had wiped out half the population of Europe two centuries earlier—broke out in Wittenberg. The whole city, understandably, panicked. Luther wrote an open letter that was a profound and practical reflection on the Christian’s response to death and suffering, the obligations that come from loving one’s neighbour, the legitimacy of self-preservation, and—as one might expect—*vocation*.

Luther challenges Christians to see opportunities to tend to the sick as tending to Christ himself (Matt. 25:41–46). Out of love for God emerges the practice of love for neighbour.

But Luther does not encourage his readers to expose themselves recklessly to danger. His letter constantly straddles two competing goods: honouring the sanctity of one’s own life and honouring the sanctity of those in need. Luther makes it clear that God gives humans a tendency toward self-protection and trusts that they will take care of their bodies (Eph. 5:29; 1 Cor. 12:21–26). He defends public health measures such as quarantines and seeking medical attention when available. In fact, Luther proposes that not to do so is to act recklessly. Just as God has gifted humans with their bodies, so too he has gifted the medicines of the earth.

Finally, we reiterate the words of our Prime Minister, we ask that New Zealand does what we do so well. We are a country that is creative, practical, and community minded. We may not have experienced anything like this in our lifetimes, but we know how to rally, and we know how to look after one another, and right now what could be more important than that. So, thank you for all that you’re about to do.

Please be strong, be kind, and unite against COVID-19



’Ofa atu fau, Nga mihi nui.

Setaita and Nicola