

At this point, we at Westview Baptist Church are continuing to offer our worship services exclusively online. This decision was not reached quickly or easily, and we know that we have people in our church who feel strongly for both sides. The church board finds themselves not holding a unanimous opinion on the wisdom of meeting in person at this time. Though the church board whole heartedly values worship there is not agreement on the risk factor involved in meeting in person.

The decision for churches to meet varies from province to province. At this point B.C, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec do not allow in person services, while Saskatchewan allows up to 30 people and Alberta up to 15% of capacity. Opinions and practices also vary from church to church even within the same denomination.

In December, Alberta declared a State of Public Health Emergency to reduce cases and protect the health care system. They stated that social gatherings are the top source of transmission of COVID-19. At that time in addition to previous guidelines they stated that faith services were limited to 15% of fire code occupancy for in-person attendance and also recommended that places of worship pursue virtual and online service if possible.

- Physical distancing between households must be maintained.
- Mask use is mandatory, including musicians.

Alternatively:

- Virtual or online services are recommended.
- Drive-in services where people do not leave their vehicles and adhere to guidance are allowed.

In late November after reflecting on the rapidly rising number of cases, staff made the decision to suspend in person services. The decision to do this was based on scientific data and these principles.

Data:

The province primarily uses three main data points: The number of active cases, the number of cases in hospital including the number in ICU, and the 'R' factor or how fast the spread is. At this point Alberta has the third highest number of active cases per hundred thousand people of all the provinces. On January 19th, the Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health said: "The positivity rate is declining," Dr. Deena Hinshaw told reporters at a news conference in Edmonton, noting it currently sits at 5.6 per cent. "But (it's) still far above the one to three per cent we saw in summer and fall. Our health-care system is still under severe strain."

Principles:

The following are four of the principles that guided our decision making:

1. The church is God's people both gathered and scattered. We are a called, set apart people, who love Jesus and are called to be his hands and feet in this world. We continue to be the church whether we meet in person or not.
2. With the power of technology we are still able to offer weekly worship services.
3. We are called to trade our freedoms for the greater good of others. Christians are called to be a people being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Jesus displayed sacrificial humility in giving up his rights and calls us to do the same. Even though we have the right to meet we believe it is a powerful witness to sacrifice that right for the safety of others.
4. We as leaders are called to shepherd our flocks, care for our sheep, pray for them and protect them. Because of the severity of this illness, the number of people who have been exposed and the number who have been ill, we felt it wise to follow the intention of our government to limit people's exposures.

We miss you, so we continue to observe and review the ongoing changes and look forward to the day we can gather again in person. Thank you for your understanding and your prayers for the church in this time.