

So can our church meet or not? Important new guidelines

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds' initial emergency proclamation that limited religious gathering to 10 or fewer all across Iowa is set to expire on April 30. Gov. Reynolds, however, has issued a new proclamation that goes into effect Friday, May 1, and continues to May 15.

Recognizing the constitutional liberties involved, Gov. Reynolds' new proclamation lifts the limits on spiritual and religious gatherings in all 99 counties. This lift also includes weddings and funerals, as they are considered religious gatherings*. Wedding receptions, however, are still limited to 10.

The proclamation reads: "Spiritual and religious gatherings are not prohibited by this section, but a church, synagogue, or other host of a spiritual or religious gathering shall implement reasonable measures under the circumstances of each gathering to ensure social distancing of employees, volunteers, and other participants, increased hygiene practices, and other public health measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 consistent with guidance issued by the Iowa Department of Public Health. Although wedding and funeral ceremonies are not covered by this section, wedding receptions of more than 10 people are social gatherings that are prohibited."

Churches have been asked to follow the social distancing guidelines set by the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).

- View the IDPH guidelines [here](#).
- View the CDC cleaning guidelines [here](#).

The FAMiLY Leader encourages churches to consider the following as they discern how to best move forward for their

congregation:

1. Weigh the responsibility. Freedom comes with responsibility. Gov. Reynolds in her proclamation recognized churches' not only constitutional, but also biblical rights to govern their own affairs. This announcement should come both as a relief and a burden – a relief that our government in Iowa is properly recognizing the role of the Church; a burden that we are now fully responsible for how the Church handles its response. Pastors and elder boards across the state will now have to wrestle what is best for not only their people, but also their communities and the Lord's name.

2. Recognize this is not an endorsement of mass gatherings. The spirit of the proclamation is the Church's autonomy, not an endorsement of mass gatherings. This is very important to understand, as churches make decisions on reopening. Though churches are exempt from limitations, large gatherings are not being recommended. Mass gatherings continue to be prohibited in all 99 counties, and social gatherings continue to be limited to 10 people.

3. Practice wisdom. This is not an easy decision, and we will feel the weight our governing authorities have felt the past few weeks. We recommend that you take your time in discerning. You do not have to come to an immediate decision. Seek an abundance of counselors and ask yourselves these questions:

- **How severe is the outbreak in our county?** Every county is different. 77 counties have been allowed to partially re-open, while another 22 remain under the previous restrictions. It is important that you assess where your county is at. If you are in a hot spot or if you have yet to have a case in your county, that can help determine best steps moving forward.
- **Does the number of people in our church and our space allow adequate social distancing?** Every church is unique. Unique in size and unique in available space.

- **Does our plan show love and respect to our neighbors?** People are responding differently to COVID-19. That includes those in and outside your church. It is important that your decision reflects care for your members and community.

Please join The FAMiLY Leader team in prayer for church leaders across Iowa, as they discern their next, best steps.

“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself” – Galatians 5:13–14 (CSB).

* The guidance on weddings and funerals represents a correction, as an earlier version of this article contained incorrect information.

The COVID crisis is a revival moment

What is God doing now? Could He be calling His people to repentance? What if THIS is a revival moment?

TFL President and CEO Bob Vander Plaats invites you to join tens of thousands around the world in a unique prayer movement that is answering 2 Chronicles 7:14’s “If my people” call with a heart for revival.

Download the FREE If 7:14 phone app today!

COVID Update: The Church as long-term solution to short-term crisis

The FAMiLY Leader President and CEO Bob Vander Plaats and TFL Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker discuss how the Church is stepping in to this time of crisis and building partnerships with government to meet needs, break bondage, and go beyond emergency response to truly setting people free.

Click here to take the assessment at [TestIowa.com](https://www.testiowa.com) now!

The Church in COVID: Out of the dark, light comes through!

The FAMiLY Leader's Bob Vander Plaats and Greg Baker share a good-news conversation about how the coronavirus crisis has caused people to refocus on family and God, has inspired the Church, and has actually advanced the gospel!

You're going to be encouraged by this video:

- *Read Greg's clear gospel presentation in his Des Moines Register column, "Easter and Coronavirus: Only one will*

transcend all time.”

- *Read the earlier column Bob alluded to, “Even in pandemic, a hopeful ‘new normal.’”*
 - *Join the global rhythm of prayer by downloading the FREE If 7:14 phone app today!*
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Easter and Coronavirus: Only one will transcend all time

by Greg Baker

The following commentary was first published by the Des Moines Register.

In just a few short weeks, the coronavirus crisis has become all-consuming. It dominates our news, schedules, pocketbooks, who we are around, our health, and so much more.

There are not many seasons in life that so dominate our attention, but there is another message that takes center stage this week: Easter. The message of Easter also radically changes lives. It is an all-consuming message that changes the way we view our schedule, our pocketbooks, our relationships, and so much more.

Yet someday coronavirus will pass into the vast records on human history. Easter, however, transcends all of human history. It is more than an event. Easter is a mindset, a reality, a truth that set the course of human history from the beginning of time and will endure for eternity.

Easter comes from an old Latin word meaning “dawn,” symbolizing the start to a new day, the sun rising, life and light. It symbolizes the reminder that God’s mercies are in

fact new every morning. It is making all things new, the beginning of the restoration of how things were meant to be.

We all know this world is not how it was meant to be. It is full of diseases, viruses, plagues, famines, poverty, sickness, crime, gossip, slander, pride and death. This was not a part of God's original design. Mankind's rebellion brought us here, a rebellion that began long ago when our ancestors listened to the devil, rather than our loving Father. It has been continued by each of us, as we chase our own desires, rather than obey the God who created the heavens and earth and holds our best interests at heart. Sin has ruined our world, God's beautiful creation.

Yet it was in the beginning of this rebellion and despair that Easter first shone. God made a promise to our ancestors as soon as sin entered the world.

He promised humanity would bear a Son, and though struck by the devil, this Son of Man would have the victory: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

God had a plan for salvation, and that plan would be told in more than 400 different Old Testament prophecies. From generation to generation mankind would put their hope in this Easter promise.

The promise of Easter began to shine bright, when 2,000 years ago, a member of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, entered this world as a man. He was clothed in humility from day one. He was born not into a wealthy family, but rather to impoverished teenage parents. He grew up in the often ill-regarded, "backwood" region of Galilee. His followers were uneducated fisherman, tax collectors, the poor, the disabled, children and women. During His triumphal entry, Jesus the King entered His capital city, not on a valiant steed, but on a donkey. His subjects

then mocked Him, beat Him, and killed Him on a cross.

Jesus was not the Messiah the world expected, but He was the Messiah the world desperately needed. Jesus did not come to change a moment in history, rather He came to change the course of history. He accomplished this by defeating our biggest enemies: sin and death. He did what none of us is capable of doing: Born of a virgin, born without sin, He lived His life in the way of righteousness and earned an eternal reward. But instead of claiming His reward, He chose substitution.

Easter begins with substitution. Each of us has amassed an unpayable debt with God for the many wrongs we have done. Scripture says that no man is righteous before God (Romans 3:10). The consequence of our sin is death – not only physical but spiritual – which results in an eternal separation from God in hell. But God did not want this for His creation, so Jesus chose substitution. On the cross, Jesus took our place. He paid for the price of sin, so that we would not have to pay it. He took on the punishment we deserved.

“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

But this is not all of Easter. On the third day, Christ rose from the dead. He was resurrected. Death has been beaten.

“Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

This is Easter. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to defeat mankind’s biggest enemies: sin and death. This message was foretold for millennia before Christ came, told for millennia after He came, and will be told until He returns.

On Easter Sunday, do not look to your current temporary

circumstance. Do not look to this current season. It will pass. Rather, look to Christ and the hope of Easter. It is the hope for not only today, but also for yesterday and tomorrow. It was spoken long before us, and will be spoken long after us. Let this dawn shine in every season.

Greg Baker is vice president of church engagement for The FAMiLY Leader.

What's God doing during the virus crisis?

Even amid the coronavirus crisis, The FAMiLY Leader's Bob Vander Plaats and Greg Baker have encouraging news. Not only is God calling us back to prayer, but He's also inspiring the Church to be His hands and feet to those in need:

Download the FREE If 7:14 phone app today!

Call to prayer: Revival amid COVID

The virus crisis is an incredible opportunity for the Church of Jesus Christ.

In this brief discussion, Bob Vander Plaats, author of "If 7:14" and president and CEO of The FAMiLY Leader, sits down

with The FAMiLY Leader's Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker and If 7:14's Kathy Van Soelen to share how we can unite in prayer for just such a time as this!

Download the FREE If 7:14 phone app today!

COVID-19 video update: Churches respond

The FAMiLY Leader's Bob Vander Plaats and Greg Baker offer an encouraging update on a call with Vice President Pence, a call with U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst, and encouraging news about the Church's response and reach to our neighbors during the coronavirus crisis.

Greg and Bob share news about drive-through food banks hosted by Iowa churches, an emergency food hotline staffed by TFL team members, and sister Church Ambassador Networks in other states – including Pennsylvania, Florida, Indiana, and Minnesota – that are following TFL's lead in working with state governments to meet community needs:

Click here to go to The FAMiLY Leader's COVID-19 response page.

Click here to listen to Sen. Ernst's phone call with Iowa pastors.

U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst talks to Iowa pastors

On Thursday, April 2, Iowa's U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst joined over 250 Iowa pastors in a conference call coordinated by The FAMiLY Leader Foundation.

The call included encouragement, prayer, answering pastor questions, and an update on how the federal government's coronavirus response impacts pastors and churches.

"Since this crisis began, our heart has been to encourage churches, governing authorities, and our communities," explains The FAMiLY Leader's Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker. "That's what we wanted for Sen. Ernst when we planned the phone call. Yes, we wanted to hear about the CARES Act and how it impacts Iowa churches, but more importantly, we wanted to sow the Word of God into her, encourage her, and pray for her. We are so thankful that after Sen. Ernst wrapped up the call, she said this was an encouraging start to her day. What an honor it has been to labor alongside so many amazing churches and governing authorities."

Sen. Ernst also shared some words of encouragement for pastors.

"I love hearing the stories of Iowans that are helping Iowans, and that certainly includes our church communities," Sen. Ernst affirmed. "The work you do is not only important because you are able to physically assist those within your communities – running errands, checking in on people – but it is also that spiritual assistance that is so desperately needed right now."

On the call, the senator updated pastors on federal efforts to aid Americans during the coronavirus crisis, including small

business loans now available for non-profit organizations. She also answered pastors' questions: on federal predictions about the duration of the crisis; about unemployment changes impacting churches and non-profits; and on how churches can meet community needs.

The call concluded with Pastor Dave Martin of Faith Church in Marshalltown leading the pastors in prayer for the senator.

You can listen to an audio recording of the call below:

Gov. Reynolds talks COVID-19 with pastors

On Tuesday, March 23, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds joined over 230 Iowa pastors in a conference call coordinated by The FAMiLY Leader Foundation.

The call included encouragement, prayer, questions, and sharing ways churches can come alongside state government to aid communities hit hard by the coronavirus crisis.

"Thank you for reaching out and asking, 'What can we do?' and, 'Here's what we can provide.' I can't tell you how much that means to my team; I can't tell you how much comfort that brings us," the governor said on the call. "And to all the pastors on the call right now, thank you for how much you're doing to meet the needs of your community, not only the individuals in your congregation, but those outside your congregation as well – to pray, support, and help them in this time of crisis."

The governor updated the pastors on her approach to the

crisis, on the latest testing and data, protections in place for healthcare providers, and more. She also answered pastor questions on aid for church employees and her ban on large community gatherings, including most church services.

“I was grateful to be on the call to hear the words and sense the heart of our governor as she works through the difficult decisions related to the crisis,” said Pastor Tim Lubinus, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Iowa, afterward. “I also appreciated the valuable information that I gained from being on the call that will help me as I lead others.”

At the pastors’ request, Gov. Reynolds also shared key community needs the government has identified and ways the church can help.

“You guys have been very proactive,” the governor affirmed. “There are countless stories of churches and faith communities that are donating resources and time to food banks, to delivering groceries, to childcare for our front-line workers, and the list goes on.”

The governor praised The FAMiLY Leader Foundation’s work recruiting churches to aid Iowa food banks and to provide temporary childcare centers for the families of first responders, health officials, and other essential-services workers.

Want to know how YOUR church can help? Click here for contacts, resources, and more!

She also touched on the simple, prayer-and-care needs that go far beyond the government’s ability to help.

“We have vulnerable, elderly people who are home. So reach out to them, see if they need you to pick up groceries or to get medicine for them,” she said. “I know you’re already doing so much in communities across our state. So just keep doing what

you're doing; it's really appreciated."

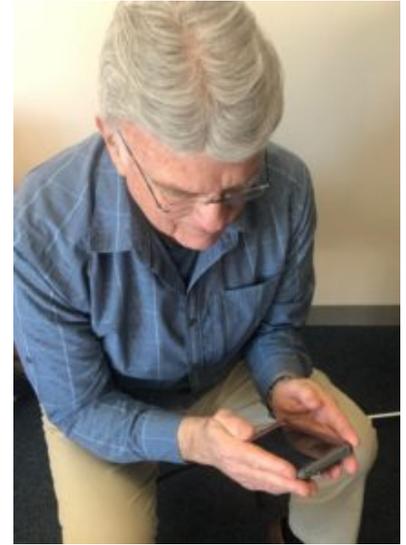
"Gov. Reynolds demonstrated the heart of a leader on our call," said Bob Vander Plaats, president and CEO of The FAMiLY Leader. "It was very apparent that she was moved by the abundance and power of prayer and at the willingness of the shepherds of God's Church to team with her as shepherd of God's government to meet local community needs. Gov. Reynolds is leading with compassion, wisdom and diligence. I can't think of anyone better to lead Iowa at this time."

After the call, TFL spoke with several pastors who were grateful for the opportunity, not only to have their questions answered, but also to hear from the governor personally.

"I was greatly encouraged to hear Governor Reynolds' heart for the people of Iowa and her deep appreciation for the prayers of Christians in Iowa," said Pastor Marcus Bratsch of River of Life Church in Cedar Rapids. "It's a privilege to have her leading our state and to intercede for her and for all our governmental leaders as they face incredibly difficult decisions during this time of crisis."

"Thank you so much for setting up that conference call with Gov. Reynolds," said Pastor Michael Demastus of Fort Des Moines Church of Christ. "It was a deep encouragement to me to hear her heart. Praying very hard for her."

For the past six years, The FAMiLY Leader Foundation's Church Ambassador Network has been building intentional relationships between the shepherds of God's church (pastors) and the shepherds of government (elected officials). The goal is for the shepherds to build into each other as people, as fellow shepherds, and as partners in meeting community needs – a model that is now being replicated by Church Ambassador Networks in 10 other states beyond Iowa.



Dr. Bill Artherholt

During her tenure both as lieutenant governor and now as governor, Reynolds has kindly welcomed pastors into her office to encourage her, pray for her, as well as find ways to meet community needs together. Now, TFL's investment in shepherd-to-shepherd relationships has created the opportunity to set up the conference call with Iowa pastors.

The call concluded with Dr. Bill Artherholt – who has been a part of every meeting TFL's Church Ambassador Network has had with Gov. Reynolds – leading the pastors in prayer for the governor.

“We’ve been blessed for the past six years to develop a relationship between Gov. Reynolds and Iowa pastors,” explains Greg Baker, vice president of church engagement for The FAMiLY Leader and executive director of TFL's Church Ambassador Network. “Our heart was to use this call to encourage both Gov. Reynolds and Iowa pastors. This has been a difficult time for both of them, and this call was an excellent opportunity for them to bless each other.”

COVID-19 news: TFL, Church partnerships rally to respond

Blood drives, food banks, child care – all across Iowa, churches are working in partnership with the government to meet the most pressing practical needs of people impacted by the coronavirus crisis.

The FAMiLY Leader's Bob Vander Plaats sits down with TFL's Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker to talk about how this came to be, how it's inspiring other states, and how YOU can help!

Give online today to join The FAMiLY Leader in honoring God AND blessing people!

Devotional: What our leaders need most right now

The FAMiLY Leader's Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker meets daily to counsel and pray with legislators and governors.

In this video devotional, Greg shares from God's Word what our leaders need most during the coronavirus crisis: