

Living during COVID-19: Part 2

Dear Friends,

Starting early in this year of 2020, the whole world fell under the shadow of Covid-19. In the months since we have become aware of how bad it really is, all our lives have drastically changed. News and updates about the pandemic dominate the news cycle, in print and on tv, across the globe. My friends in America tell me that news and updates on the virus are a constant daily affair. And sadly, a reminder of all we have lost ... our loved ones, friends, neighbors ... and our freedoms.

While I understand that it has become difficult to constantly hear this type of news, I feel it is my responsibility, as your Mission Pastor, to be the one to keep you updated about the changes that are happening in Ghana due to the pandemic. This article is the second part of my July article, and the fifth article in this series that has been following the Ghanaian perspective of Covid-19. These articles are meant to keep you informed and to also let you know that we are surviving here, as you are, under the most difficult of circumstances.

These are the updated numbers for Covid-19 in Ghana, at the time this article was written:

Ghana :

Confirmed cases - 41,003

Deaths - 215

Recovered - 38,330

The President of the nation, Edward Nana Akuffo Addo, in his 14th Address to the Nation, July 26, relaxed some of the restrictions, but made it mandatory that all should wear face masks and maintain social distance. Failure to comply attracts a fine or some appropriate punitive measure to deter people. The police and other security agencies are mandated to enforce this.

I am so happy, for now, that nobody in Akrampa has contracted Covid-19. Some give the reasons that their local herbs provide more than adequate protection and raise their immune system highly to protect them. It's only lately that when they fall seriously ill that they go to the hospital. All of their lives, they have been using herbs for most cures. I am sure you're wondering if they do 'social distancing'. They don't. One will find in many other communities all over Ghana, that, because we are characteristically very involved in many social activities, people throw caution to the wind.

In the latest 'update' some restrictions were reduced, with the **exception** of nightclubs, beaches and other such places which hitherto attracted large gatherings.

With the latest update, Religious Organizations may now meet for up to two (2) hours per service. Where a church service can accommodate more than a hundred persons at any time, that facility may do so, but should strictly ensure that the distance between any two persons should be a meter. Same applies to weddings, but funerals are to still have not more than 100 persons attending.

This has brought some some sigh of relief to worshippers. As I have had to emphasize previously, the typical African, indeed the typical Ghanaian church services are characteristically very involved, with lots of dancing, clapping of hands and loud singing. It's not uncommon to see several people sweating because of this kind of exertion. This kind of situation, in many churches, is where one will see responses from the worshippers to appeals for money. It's only because of Covid-19 that some congregants are being impressed upon to make use of online mediums to give offering and pay their tithes.

The 'new normal' is that many churches are now using the internet to live stream their services, however limited. Many churches are unable to afford the cost of the internet because, like for those in the rural areas, it's virtually impossible to offer such services to them. The majority of their members are not at the level of accepting such services as an alternative. They prefer to be physically present and to participate in the service. Therefore, the live streaming is only in the cities/big towns and by those churches that have the financial ability to maintain and sustain it. Many churches are disregarding the 'no singing' restrictions and some are allowing their choirs to use their robes, although no procession or recession.

Update on the situation of schools in Ghana:

Schools and other educational institutions such as: tertiary, secondary, basic like the junior high schools, that were to have graduating classes, were allowed to open so the students would begin preparations for the end of year examinations.

About 40% of Ghanaian schools are actually considered boarding schools, with students living in dorms on campus. Most of these schools house a mix of boys and girls. All the schools were fumigated and disinfected before the administration received the students, yet in one 'female only' school, the news broke after three weeks in school that 54 of them had contracted Covid-19.

Other schools were also reporting Covid-19 infections, but with numbers in the single digits. This led to some agitation by some members of the public who had initially opposed the government order to reopen schools, to 'final year' students. The new infections inside the schools began to raise the protests again from parents and society. The government has stood its ground, and therefore the students are still in school. Students in secondary schools, even as I send this article, are writing their final examinations. We still don't have any idea yet as to when schools will return to fully operational to include all children. The speculations are rife and reasons for or against are equally many.

Students in Junior High Schools, like Akrampa, will write their examinations in September. Our Akrampa school, this year, will be having its 4th batch of students to write the end of junior high school examination. It has come to my notice that the data that I last gave you (of 5 girls and 11 boys) is not correct. I'm sorry for that. This year our Akrampa Junior High graduating class has **18 students; 10 girls and 8 boys**. The teachers of the Akrampa graduating class are to be commended, for their dedication and commitment, particularly those helping the graduating class to prepare for the examinations in September.

Blessings, Pastor Bennett Wilson