

## Living during COVID-19

Dear Friends,

As we are all now living through this difficult time together, I am sure you understand if I feel compelled to talk about the global pandemic, the new coronavirus -COVID-19, in subsequent articles. Everywhere now, in Ghana, we are talking about how the President of Ghana, Nana Akuffo Addo, describes the times in which we live: "***these are not normal times***". This has led to a new slogan, which we all say to one another, kind of reminding everyone, that we are not in ***normal times***. Indeed, some are even saying, alternatively, that we are in the ***new normal***. The explanation given to this ***term*** is that it is best to accept that this pandemic has come to ***stay***, so our ***lifestyle*** must from now on be lived with that understanding.

Why is this view being propagated? The basic reason is because it is now accepted that similar to common diseases like the ***flu*** (influenza), and like our peculiar disease, ***malaria*** (which is now an endemic in our part of the world), COVID-19 has also come to stay. We must now accept that as such and learn to live with it.

The difficulty in accepting this fact is because it has necessitated the acceptance of the cultivation of habits like the constant wearing of face masks, social distancing, and strict enforcement of personal hygiene. Universally, human beings are social creatures and these new restrictions appear not only hard to abide by but very alien to the way of life of every human, not just the Ghanaian. The reason for the need to accept this is the fact that the data on cases, worldwide, continues to rise, and there is little hope of any medicine or drug, neither a vaccine, available soon to cure it. The current data for our two countries, since the last article, is as follows.

**Ghana**

Confirmed cases - 20,085

Deaths - 122

Recovered - 14,870

**United States**

Confirmed cases - 2,932,596

Deaths - 130,133

Need I reiterate, that irrespective of location, worldwide, the loss of any human life is not to be taken for granted. In Ghana, and for that matter every nation in the world the impact of the pandemic, is so devastating, with the certainty of very lasting and destructive consequences.

In some parts of the world the new cases of COVID-19 are increasing. In others, like some small European countries the virus spread has all but stopped. But overall most countries are now easing restrictions, and Ghana is no exception.

In Ghana we have what is described as 'Presidential Updates' where the President of the nation speaks to the entire nation on measures taken against spread of coronavirus. In his 10<sup>th</sup> Update, given on **Sunday, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2020**, the President announced that religious bodies may now have meetings/services in person and not just online. These religious meetings/services should **not** have more than **100** people gathering at any one time. Particularly for Christian and Muslim services where the chapel or mosque has a large membership, they are now allowed to have more than one service in a day with a hundred worshippers in every service. The service should last no more than **one hour**.

This restriction raised several challenges to those churches and mosques who have huge numbers. Some actually thought that even if they held 10 services in a day that would not cover their needs. Already some churches with huge congregations had up to four services in a day, with numbers in the hundreds, some actually recording up to a thousand.

In a typical Ghanaian church of the Protestant tradition a normal service would last for not less than two and a half hours! There would be lots of dancing and singing, other activities, the hymn singing and the sermons. In view of this such churches with huge congregations declined to use this opportunity. In the earlier restrictions no meetings or church service of any sort were allowed, under any circumstances. Some charismatic churches who disobeyed had their leadership arrested and prosecuted. Where it was really necessary for gathering like weddings and private funerals, no more than **25 people** were permitted at any time.

Beginning in June all schools/educational institutions; tertiary, secondary, basic like the junior high schools, with **graduating classes** have all been asked to open so the students would be prepared for the end of year examinations. Our Akrampa school has a graduating class and so the students are back to school. Our graduating class this year is only **5 girls** and **11 boys**. There is the strict compliance of the wearing of face masks by all.

A building for the purposes of instructing pupils in Home Arts (or Home Economics) is being constructed for the Akrampa school. Initially, it was intended to be a kitchen just for the cooking of the school's breakfast for the students. As plans developed it was changed and added to so that the students taking courses in Home Arts will be able to use it for classes and practical exams. This building was made possible by a large donation from a wonderful friend of the Ghana mission. WE give thanks for her every day. The new "kitchen building" has also benefitted from donations from other congregation members -thank you! And we are hoping to be able to put the finishing touches on it with money from an FLC Grant. Please keep us in prayer for that.

But aside from any financial situation, the actual construction of the new kitchen building was put on hold during all of the lockdowns for COVID-19. That and a few other things have delayed the completion of the building. It is sad. If our new kitchen building had been completed on schedule, then this year's students graduating from Akrampa would have been the first to have used the building to prepare them for their exams.

The issue of wearing masks has become law. No one is allowed into any building (except in one's own home) if that individual doesn't have a mask on. One will not be allowed on public transport to travel to any destination without a mask, etc. The police (security personnel) are to arrest and fine anyone who walks about or works in any public institution without a mask. The initial government directive was that even in churches, all must have masks on including the officiating ministers. There was to be no singing during church, and the choir must not have robes on, neither are they allowed to do a procession into church at the beginning of the service nor a recession at the close of the service. Some churches are allowing their choirs to have robes on and even sing but none of them are doing a procession or recession.

The changes are numerous across all parts of society and continue to be fluid and changing as time goes on. As we say, this is the "new normal". But we still have to choose to LIVE and continue to do the work of our Lord to the best of our abilities, with His help.

In all of this, we continue to trust the Lord.

Pastor Bennett Wilson