



A Letter from Your Elders Regarding the Current Provincial Lockdowns

Dear UBC Family,

Let me begin with a word of blessing and peace as we enter into this wondrous and joyous New Year. It is wondrous and joyous because it is the gift of a sovereign God who loves us so much that He has given us His One and Only Son. And, since He has given us His Son, He will also along with Him graciously give us all good things. Our God is amazingly gracious and worthy of our fullest praise and worship!

I would like to share with you our Elders' prayerful and, we trust, biblical response to the recent Provincial lockdown and its implications for our worship and mission. While a much fuller discussion is in order, I would like to offer a brief expression of the understanding we believe the Lord has given us to this point.

Like you, we are deeply concerned for the people of UBC and for the Uxbridge community. This prolonged pandemic has been very difficult for all of us. And while we have all done our best to rise to meet the challenge, we are profoundly mindful it has not left us unscathed.

Our compelling desire is to be led by faith and not by fear, to move forward boldly in love, grace, and wisdom. We pray for the glory of God to be revealed in the Church in these times, and for the coming of the Kingdom of God and the will of God in Uxbridge as it is in Heaven.

Because the current lockdown raises questions about the appropriate response of the Church of Jesus Christ, we want to offer the following affirmations which guide our actions.

1. The Church is Essential

The Church is essential by *nature*. The Church is the creation of Christ, established as His body by His word (Col. 1:21). He chooses not to be without His body. He will build, preserve, and lead His Church such that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Phil. 1:6; Matt. 16:18).

The Church is essential in its *mission*. Christ has sent the Church into the world to boldly proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), calling men, women, and children to repent, turning from the kingdom of darkness and being brought into the kingdom of light, restoring right relationship with God and peace among men. While it appears that almost the entire focus of the world these days is on physical health, human beings are much more complex spiritual, psychological, and relational beings. The Church plays an essential and irreplaceable role in society and individual lives, especially in the realms of spiritual, psychological, and relational health. We denounce the notion that Church is non-essential and can be harmlessly locked down as a unnecessary human activity. We affirm that we must by all means fulfil our mission.

2. Obedience to Christ is Essential.

Christ has commanded us to meet together (Heb. 10:24-25). There simply is no way to fulfil the command to be the Church (with its worldwide mission, witness, rites, worship and all the one-anothers of the Bible) without being together in person. While we may be able to operate somewhat virtually for a season, we can never settle for this as normal, let alone optimal.

Obedience to Christ entails obedience to the subordinate authority of the state, insofar as the state serves its divinely ordained mandate. We hold to the biblical injunctions of Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-25, which remind us that

human authorities are appointed by God as a good gift to His people. To resist these authorities is to resist what God has appointed and to incur judgment. At the same time, we recognize we are a people governed by the representatives of the people. This means that we have a necessary role in shaping government policy. We must not be timid in vocalizing our concerns and contending for the freedom of the Church and our communities.

3. Human life is sacred.

We affirm the sanctity of life. All human persons are created in the image of God (Gen. 9:6) and precious in His sight. Christians historically have been at the forefront of movements related to the protection, preservation and prospering of life. To act in a way that recklessly endangers life is contrary to our gospel mandate. We do not consider it an overreach of government authority to preserve life by ordering codes for the construction and safe operation of church buildings. We do consider it an overreach of government when orders are given which unnecessarily or unreasonably limit the gathering of the church and the fulfilment of its mission. In such cases it is incumbent upon the Church to dialogue with government to arrive at reasonable practices that do not hinder the worship of God or the advance of the gospel. Where such agreement is not forthcoming the Church is compelled to obey Christ rather than men (Acts 5:29), which may entail actions of respectful civil disobedience.

We acknowledge that neither the Church nor the government has all the information required to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic with minimal disruption to our lives. Sometimes broader measures are required because we do not yet know the optimal finer measures which will mitigate the pandemic and at the same time maximally preserve our freedoms. In such instances we believe it is prudent to adopt a "better safe than sorry" approach, but only as is reasonable, considerate of all the relevant issues, and for a limited time.

On the basis of the above considerations, our Elders are advocating that for the moment we comply with the Provincial lockdown, which is why we have transitioned to livestream services only. We are disappointed that these measures impact our ability to gather in person as a church family, and we eagerly look forward to the time we can meet together again in person and without restrictions. While we believe there is a time when the Church is called upon to respectfully practice civil disobedience, we do not believe we have yet arrived at that time. We are closely monitoring developments as they come. Because the lockdown measures are temporary (four weeks), because the Church has not been specifically discriminated against, and because these measures are genuinely for the public good and the preservation of life, we believe we should comply with them.

We do understand there are those who see things differently. Some believe the time has come for civil disobedience. Others believe we have not been compliant enough. And many find themselves somewhere in the middle. Our plea is that you will persevere in the pursuit of grace, mutual respect, and unity in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us "prefer one another" and serve one another in love.

We encourage you to be bold and courageous in these fear-filled times. Be creative. Find new and effective ways to uphold one another, to spur one another on to love and good works, to encourage one another to grow up into full maturity in Christ.

We are calling each one to a special season of prayer. You will hear more about this in the coming days and weeks. And we are encouraging you to (re-)join an online Life Group, which is our best way of doing life together to the glory of God.

Your Pastors, Elders and Deacons are eager to hear from you. We will be available throughout this period. Please contact us with your questions and concerns.

Finally, we would express our deepest love for you, and we call for your esteem, love, and support as we navigate through these challenging times.

May the grace and peace of Christ be with you all.

On behalf of your UBC Elders,

Pastor Dale Dawson