

Churches Closing Across U.S. Due to Coronavirus Pandemic, Ministries Calling for Urgent Fasts

Churches across the U.S. are closing their doors as the coronavirus continues to spread. Meanwhile, many ministries are calling for fasting and prayer to end the virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) a pandemic, with over 132,000 confirmed cases globally and almost 5,000 deaths. The CDC reports that there is a total of 1,215 cases of the coronavirus in the U.S., and 36 people have died from it.

Many governors are discouraging people from attending large gatherings. California Gov. Gavin Newsome banned gatherings over 250, causing Disneyland to shut down. Four other states have issued similar bans, including New York, Oregon, Ohio and Washington.

Charisma News previously reported that Pastor Judah Smith announced Churchome's main campus in Kirkland, Washington, is closed for the time being because of the coronavirus. He says church at home will be a part of Churchome's vision moving forward.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear requested that houses of worship cancel their services at least through March 15, according to the Baptist Press. North Carolina churches are also urged to cancel services and other public gatherings for the time being, reports the *News & Observer*.

Some churches in Kentucky, however, are refusing to close but are still taking precautions to reduce the risk of spreading

the virus, reports the Christian Post.

Popular Bible teacher Beth Moore says this is a bad idea.

It would be a mistake for us in Christian circles to disregard the warnings about large gatherings. If the thought is, "We're the church. We'll do whatever we please & God will protect us," He does not protect the proud. He opposes them. We are not snake handlers. We're servants.

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) March 13, 2020

For Christian families who stay home from church, LifeWay is offering free spiritual resources for at-home discipleship. "LifeWay Kids at Home" is a free digital resource to supplement Sunday school while at home.

While temporary, the resource is available to everyone, says LifeWay Kids Director of Operations Chuck Peters.

"The coronavirus presents many challenges, but every obstacle is an opportunity," he says. "We have the privilege of aiding parents and caregivers—people who may have never done so—to conduct a Bible study in their home. We get to help facilitate that at no cost, no obligation and no strings attached for these churches and families. It's why we're here: We're a ministry first."

Meanwhile, several ministries are issuing public calls to prayer and fasting for the coronavirus to end.

Intercessory leader Lou Engle is calling the global church to a three-day "Esther Fast" in order "to take a stand against the destructive spread of the coronavirus," he says in a newsletter.

The purpose of the fast March 18-20 is "to humble ourselves, confess our sins and the sins of our nation (Joel 2), and cry out to God for mercy," he writes. "Then, on the third day, as

when Esther went before the king, let us gather together in small or large groups and stand as the *ekklesia* before the King of glory! Let us stretch out His rod of authority out of Zion and rebuke the coronavirus in united corporate agreement, believing in faith that the storm will abate, stadiums will be filled and 2020 will go down as the year of the historic advance of evangelism and missions worldwide.”

Christian author and speaker Autumn Miles is also calling believers to a fast, this time for one day on March 20.

“Throughout the Bible, we see examples of fasting in times of crisis,” she says. “We talk a lot about the faith of a mustard seed being able to move mountains, but we rarely talk about the next statement in that passage, which says ‘this kind [of faith] does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’”

Miles encourages believers to declare specific Scriptures throughout the day on March 20 as they pray for the coronavirus to end, those already affected to be healed and the virus’ impact on the world economy to be reversed.

“Fasting is our secret weapon of prayer,” she says. “Fasting produces supernatural things in us and for us. I can’t explain it, except to say that God moves when we sacrifice for him. And if there was ever a time we needed God to move in a mighty way, it’s now.”

Likewise, the Austin Disaster Relief Network is partnering with the Unceasing Prayer Movement and the HOPE Prayer Room to call churches in Austin, Texas, to prayer on Monday, March 16, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. So far, Austin has reported two confirmed cases of the coronavirus, according to the Texas Tribune.