



Amsterdam Council of Christian Leaders

To: Churches in Amsterdam
From: Amsterdam Council of Christian Leaders
Re: How we as churches in Amsterdam can deal with corona with wisdom?

2 Tim 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Dear pastors and leaders of churches in Amsterdam,
This letter comes to you in a very challenging time for all the citizens of our city and this is also deeply felt by pastors and leaders of churches. Church members are confronted with suffering in health, social, psychological, and economic consequences which deeply affect the role of pastors and leaders of churches. This is amplified by the advice of the government to limit the size of groups that congregate both in churches as in homes. What is the best way to respond to this situation?

First of all, we are called to be an instrument of hope and blessing for our own people and the people in the city. Our ministries and possibilities may be challenged severely but the Kingdom of God is a source of righteousness peace and joy through the Holy Spirit. The message of the Gospel and the presence of God is the greatest gift we have in these times. Please be encouraged to find ways to connect your people with each other, with God, and with the world around them to minister the grace and power of God in ways that are still possible. God will make us creative!

One of the remains of our Christian roots in the Dutch culture is that we as a church have far-going constitutional freedom (how to organize, fellowship, worship, and what we teach). During the current partial lockdown, our government made an exception to the number of people that were allowed to be in a gathering. For worship purposes, the rules of the summer applied to allow large gatherings (within the 1,5-meter distancing and restrictions on singing subject to the building characteristics). Since a few weeks, this has been changed into strong advice for churches and religious gatherings to limit the size to 30 persons (with 1,5 m distance and refrain from singing as a congregation (except for worship team) unless your accommodation has space and ventilation that is guarantees safety for the members (see <https://eerstehulpbijventilatie.nl/ruimte-berekening-co2/> for an online calculation tool that might help you). The churches and other religious institutions have the advice to follow this, the government is not putting us under the law.

Various Christians and churches have different views on the wisdom and even the legitimacy of the corona measures. We respect the different opinions, however, we as ACCL, who represents leadership from several networks and ministries in Amsterdam, urge every church to respect the advised regulations by our government and city council in their efforts to bring this COVID-19 under control. We realize and know from our own experience that following these instructions comes with a high cost, in terms of the way we want to have our worship services, connecting your members, ministry practices, emotional, social, and financial consequences. However, we believe that not following the advice have even more negative effects. Within the regulations, there might be more opportunities to minister and then you might think. Pastors and other ministers are falling under the category of 'contact beroep' (see: <https://www.cioweb.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ND290520-Brief-CIO->



Amsterdam Council of Christian Leaders

aan-kerken-Predikant-is-contactberoep.pdf). This makes it possible to be within 1,5 meters when done with good precautions and only in cases that it is required for ministry actions.

First, health effects. The number of people that are infected and have to be hospitalized and the portion that is ending up in ICU is rising quickly. We believe in healing and pray for the sick, but we have also the responsibility to create a safe environment for our people - especially the elderly and vulnerable. People with underlying medical conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart, and respiratory medical problems have a severe higher risk of getting very ill or even pass away. Safety measures help reduce these risks.

Second, solidarity. The whole of society is suffering from partial lockdown measures. These are not aimed at us as churches but are felt by all organizations and many businesses. As discussed above the Churches have been under more freedom than most of these other organizations. We are not keeping the regulations out of a spirit of fear, but out of a heart or love for our people and our city. The text below from Romans deals with the different views on rules of food and observance of days, we believe that in the same spirit we should apply it to distancing and other basic regulations that minimize the spread of infections.

Rom 14: 17-19

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Third, our witness in the city. We believe that we as a Church in the city have a very high responsibility to have a reputation of compassion, love, and engagement with the pain and brokenness of society. We should not be seen as a source of infections or people that make use of liberties that others do not have. We want to be known as people that demonstrate we have a message of hope, of eternal significance far beyond the earthly affairs. That we have a peace that has a source outside the circumstances. That we are not worried about the church, because Christ reigns and He will not let the gates of hell overcome his church. We would love to have a reputation of people that serve the wellbeing of the people in Amsterdam in these hard times with faith, love, and hope of the Kingdom of God. Find ways to mobilize and equip your people to be a blessing wherever they go and bring the good news of the Gospel in word and deed. Let's expect the fruit of the Kingdom.

Acts 2:47 .. praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

Finally:

Let's pray for our city and the people who are responsible to lead the response to this crisis. 1 Tim 1:1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.



Amsterdam Council of Christian Leaders

Let's stand together in unity and solidarity in this. We would love to see that we can do this together and also help each other to deal with the situation together. Please share the issues that you face and questions you might have with your colleagues in the networks of the city, or to make it known to us. There are churches in Amsterdam who have great experiences on how to connect with members, via stream, online meetings, and interactions. Others are organizing the church in small groups that can still meet in houses or do it virtually. There are wonderful reports of many outsiders watching live streams and participating in online Alpha Courses. Some churches see an increase in baptisms and other testimonies. We are encouraging you to share useful experiences that might help other churches/leaders dealing with the current challenges. You can send it to us so we can share this in our networks. Also, you are welcome to voice your struggles or concerns regarding your situation in this corona crisis. Let's stand together!

We pray for deep blessings and wisdom over you,

The Amsterdam Council of Christian Leaders

Council members: Pastors Stanley Hofwijks, Moses Alagbe, Oswald Hart, Jan Meijerink, Dick Westerhof, Willem Griffioen and Piet Brinksma