

**Marlin D. Harris, Senior Pastor****NEW LIFE CHURCH'S OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO GEORGIA'S DECISION TO REOPEN BUSINESSES  
AND CHURCHES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

April 21, 2020

Grace and greetings to the New Life Church Family. Governor Brian Kemp held a press conference yesterday, Monday, April 20, to announce that the State of Georgia will now allow businesses and churches to reopen despite our state and nation being gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. While New Life is looking forward to the day when we can open our doors to our congregation and community, we are officially announcing that we **do not** believe a decision to do so now is wise, or responsible, as long as the Department of Health reports a continued rise in Georgia COVID-19 cases and mass testing operations remain severely limited.

I have had the opportunity to confer with our church's Senior Leadership Team, comprised of our Elders and Staff Directors, to discuss what would be a prudent course of action to take given Governor Kemp's recent decision. We believe that remaining in the 'Shelter-in-Place' status, until better testing on a mass scale can be executed, is the wisest action to take while the dangers of this active pandemic are still a reality.

As a Leadership Team, we fully understand the economic distress and hardship that has been caused by the decision to shut down non-essential businesses and to enforce social distancing measures. However, the current medical and scientific data available to us overwhelmingly calls for us to resist a decision to publicly gather again for economic, social or worship purposes. Even worse, the current data indicates that a premature opening of our state will lead to a disastrous increase in COVID-19 cases, thereby increasing the likelihood that this pandemic will cause even more devastation.

**National reports and current research indicate:**

- The State of Georgia is 46<sup>th</sup> in coronavirus testing, which is consistently cited by experts as one the first steps necessary for reopening the economy. We simply do not have sufficient tests, nor the ability to conduct large-scale testing, given our current state of pandemic preparedness;
- Given the fact that communities of color have been overwhelmingly devastated by this pandemic, when compared to other communities, the decision to reopen gyms, restaurants, salons, and other businesses where workers and customers are in close proximity is both irresponsible and immoral; and
- Medical responses from other states, with climbing COVID-19 cases, contradict the claim that our medical system is ready to handle the new cases of COVID-19 that we believe will be a direct result of reopening. Even with the very capable medical professionals and hospitals that we have in our state, our experience demonstrates that we, as a nation, are imminently unprepared to handle this pandemic.

New Life has been committed to caring for the poor and oppressed throughout the life of our church's history, therefore we must speak out against a decision that will certainly affect impoverished and marginalized communities of color at gravely disproportionate rates. We believe this leadership decision from our Governor's office is not only a social concern, it is more importantly, a moral one. Silent compliance at this time would be a deep failure on our part as a spiritual community charged with caring for those who belong to our church family and our larger beloved community.

**We believe, moreover, that we should refrain from reopening at this time for the following practical reasons:**

- We are unable to sanitize our campus properly given the extreme shortage of cleaning and sanitizing supplies available nationally;
- We wish to protect our church parishioners and volunteers from medical emergencies that we are untrained and unprepared to effectively and safely navigate;
- We wish to protect our children, in our Children's Ministry environments, from medical emergencies that may arise while this pandemic is still in its critical phase; and
- We are unable to effectively manage social distancing during our worship gatherings, and throughout other spaces on our campus.

As a result of all the above considerations, New Life Church has decided to continue to practice health safety by limiting our services to online platforms. We are working tirelessly to increase the number of ministries operating online so that our congregation can continue to be discipled and stay connected, as well as making ourselves available to our larger community. We believe that this decision is in the best interest of protecting the elderly and vulnerable as this terrible disease continues to run its course. Also, we will continue to inform our church family and guests of our week-to-week ministry operations via our website and our Internet broadcasts until this pandemic passes its most critical stages.

New Life, you have been simply phenomenal during this entire ordeal through your love, and your dedicated support. You have proven that we are truly a "church without walls". Therefore, now more than ever, let's not become lax in our commitment to defeat this virus.

The Bible reminds us that "*the prudent see danger and take refuge*" (Proverbs 27:12). Let's be a prudent church and fully honor this season of 'Sheltering-in-Place'. Our inability to gather is allowing the true strength of the Church to shine. We are proof that the power of the Christian community is greater than the building that houses it. For this reason, we are convinced that even without public meetings, "new life" can spread from anywhere!

I love you dearly New Life, and I am waiting with a longing heart for when we can worship our Lord together again. We remain,

Yours Because of His Love,

Pastor Marlin D. Harris, and the New Life Senior Leadership Team