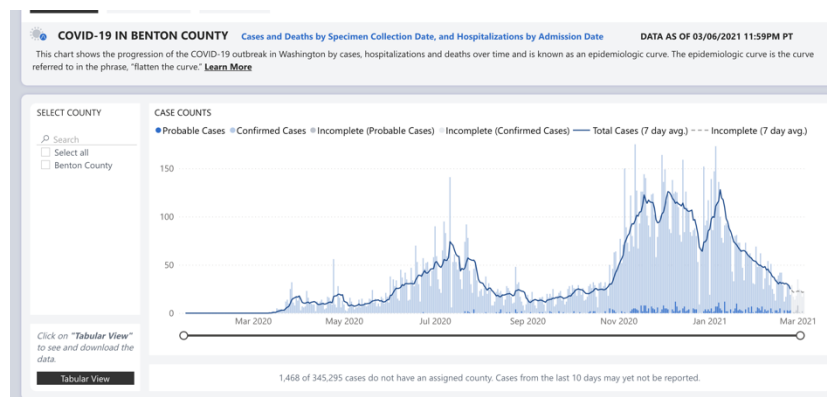


Dear Brothers and Sisters,

If you are receiving this letter it is because you have been “exiled” from the gathering of our church due to covid. You may have a pre-existing condition or are regularly in contact with those who do and so are prohibited from being able to gather with the church. Or you may not have any conditions that put you “at-risk” but simply feel like the risk of gathering is just too high.

The good news is that our infection rate continues to decline. Here is a chart of our county’s epidemiological curve (a phrase at one point in time I would have had to look up to understand; remember those days? They were nice.)



Since early January our case counts have been falling, following the wider trend across our country. While the curve could shoot upwards again, as it has in the past, it seems less likely to do so now due to the arrival of the vaccine. On the other hand, of course, we don’t know what the future holds and I am no doctor and no epidemiologist.

But, I am a pastor. This letter comes out of a pastoral love and care for you all. While I understand that for many of you the circumstances that are keeping you home are out of your control I want to leave a pebble in your shoe. I want you to feel a sense of frustration at being unable to gather. God has designed the Christian life to be corporately shaped; notice Paul’s passing comment, “when you gather *as a church*” (1 Cor 11:18). As in, a “church” is somehow *more* of a church when it gathers together corporately than when it is apart. Thus, if we are isolated from that gathering—even for legitimate, good reasons!—we should *feel* a sense of spiritual discombobulation: *something isn’t right*. You cannot replace church with a Facebook live video.

Fortunately, I have been able to stay in contact with virtually all of you and know firsthand that most of you feel that angst, that frustration. I know that some of you are chomping at the bit to return! And I pray that can happen soon. This letter isn’t intended to be rolled up newspaper thwacking your head—not at all. I am more concerned about a subtler, under-the-radar effect a prolonged period of non-attendance may have on your soul. It is virtually impossible to assume

that failing to gather for corporate worship or small group for nearly a year will not create a new kind of rhythm in your life. So, here are some questions to consider:

What are you doing now to push against an unhealthy new kind of spiritual habit being formed in your life?

Husbands and fathers, how are you leading your family now spiritually through this remarkable time?

What are you proactively doing to ensure your response is being determined by wisdom, not anxiety?

At what point will you return to corporate worship?

Have you considered how your absence has not only affected you, but the rest of the body?

Our church's response to covid has been to take it seriously and to practice social distancing and mask wearing. We fully understand that many of you have significant health issues and are responding wisely. We also know that many of you have labored to stay connected as best as you can via technology. My desire is not to condemn but to remind: we all are sinners, tempted in various ways, and Satan is prowling around like a hungry lion. We might need to deviate from God's design in extraordinary circumstances temporarily, but we can't do it perpetually. You can hold your breath underwater for a time, but not indefinitely. In short, while we are considering the real risks and real cost with contracting this virus, I am also asking all of us to consider the real risks and real cost of remaining isolated, of continuing to hold our proverbial breath.

Consider this letter to be a gentle "nudge" towards two goals: (1) think about how you will be or currently are being tempted in your isolation from the body and ask yourself: "What am I doing about this?", and (2) given the rollout of the vaccine, consider returning to fellowship sometime soon.

Again, this letter is an extension of my pastoral care and oversight of you all and is born out of love. The elders of Quinault desire to care for the flock that has been entrusted to us, and that includes you. We are praying for wisdom and Spirit-guided insight for yourselves as you evaluate your situation and for ourselves as we consider how to care for you well. Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions at all.

Grace and Peace,  
- Pastor Marc

*But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face. – 1 Thess. 2:17*