



March 12, 2020

Dear Eden community:

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has made these anxious days. The illness that has affected so many people around the world, and caused the death of thousands, saddens our hearts. The warnings that this virus will surely spread to many more over the next months, causes us to worry not only about our own health and that of those very close to us but also our responsibility to act with others to halt its spread.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, as of today, here are Eden's plans.

We are going to shift classes from face to face, to online classes from Friday March 13 until Monday April 13.

Because Eden's educational program is never just what happens in class but includes chapel and community events and casual conversation, we will begin a series of opportunities for continuing to gather remotely, with the help of Zoom and other technologies.

All students in contextual education will need to work with their contextual education site and their supervisor to determine how these individual communities will respond. Learning from how they respond will be an important learning and will be part of the PCL seminar discussions.

You will note that our first day back is the day after Easter. For generations, the days after Easter have been days when alumni have returned to Eden for Spring Convocation. Sadly, this year we have decided to cancel Spring Convocation. This means that classes will resume in face to face formats on a regular schedule during the week of April 13th.

We will be in very regular electronic contact with the community as the situation and information about it changes

Background:

It is the custom of Christian communities like ours in anxious times to raise to God prayers of hope and healing. And we will continue to do so in myriad ways.

For more than a week a task group of faculty and staff at Eden has been working on appropriate ways to respond to the spread of the virus. As we have worked on these things, we have kept in mind that we are a school, a residential community, and a gathering place for many. As we have been working on these issues, we have held the following values in mind:

- We take the health of all students, employees and visitors very seriously and want to do all we can to reasonably protect their health
- We affirm that we are an educational community that understands education as far more than a sequence of classes or a list of requirements.
- We are embedded in a vibrant church context.

- We want to respond seriously and cautiously without fueling undue fear.
- We live in a community with excellent health care and knowledgeable medical advisors.

Because the spread of the COVID-19 virus changes daily, we are determined to have plans that are clear and open to change.

Nothing makes this point clearer to me than a change of plan that happened over night. When I left work last night, we had determined that we would continue as we have been but with heightened care about hygiene, vigilance about watching for symptoms and extra support for those at high risk.

But more study and prayer last night led me to a different understanding. Until last night I was wanting to continue the course until we had more indication that the virus was an imminent threat in St. Louis and in our region. Today I feel differently. Today I see a strong need to implement a “social distancing” plan with the aim of joining many other communities in radically reducing the pathways for the virus to spread. I have not doubted the inevitability of the virus’s spread but thought we should deal with it when it arrives. My mind has shifted. As reflected above, I now, in consultation with other leaders of the Seminary believe we should change our pattern of gathering so that it will change the progression of the disease. Eden Seminary is not closed during these days. Staff and faculty will be working and will be available to respond to the needs of our students, contextual education sites, or donors and all who make up our community. We will be using remote technologies whenever it is possible and will mostly be at home. So, phone or email or text. We want to stay in touch. Watch our website for regular updates.

These are anxious times. In such times I have always taken comfort in the words of

Isaiah 41:10

Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

What I have always liked about this is what it does not say. It does not say “there is nothing to fear.” No, the prophet knows there is much to fear. Instead in the face of fear, the prophet says fear not because God is with us.

Together this Lent, we are undertaking a very different Lenten discipline, one we did not expect. Let us continue to be the strong Eden educational community in ways we have rarely used and by doing so promote the health of all.

Sincerely,



David Greenhaw

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