

News from Sri Lanka

Dear Friends in Christ,

Once again, it has been a while since I was last in touch with you, but now that the coronavirus crisis has hit us all throughout the world, we thought it was high time we got in touch to find out how you are getting on, and to give you our news. We have been hearing a lot of news about the crisis, mostly about how it is now affecting countries such as China, Iran, Italy, Spain and the USA - but you may not have much news about how it is affecting Sri Lanka.

For last 60 hours we were under Police curfew and today it lift for six hours and again after 2pm it will continue till Thursday 6am. Government along with Military and Health authorities taking possible measures to control the spreading of the virus, yet it is sad to say that some of the civilians are not take those into their serious consideration and this non responsive behaviour cause problem for all. To date we have 86 infected and the situation of two are critical, 222 are in observation and 01 recovered. other than this 4000 are in quarantine camps and over 7000 are in home quarantine. Our airports are partly shutdown and there is a travel band imposed and continuing since last two days and no passenger arrivals are allowed. Departures allowed after quarantine. Other than that there is continues curfew in some areas, and that Parliamentary elections have been postponed.

Thank God, so far no positive case reported from Kandy (Town / District where I live) while being a tourist attraction. 98 percent of the infected Sri Lankans are from Italy and most of them reside in west and north west of the island. At the initial stage they did not cooperate with the government ruling as they were feared to expose themselves for proper health checking due to some other complications (transferable disease?) have been developed during their long stay in Italy. Some of them are without passport or proper travel document or visa and so on.

So how are you all? Have there been coronavirus cases in your areas, and how is your church responding? Here in Sri Lanka, most people were living life pretty normally until last Monday - 16 March - when there was a very serious Government announcement that things were getting a lot worse, that people should start distancing themselves from others, and isolate themselves at home if they are displaying symptoms or are elderly or vulnerable, and that people should stop going to places like cafes, restaurants and theatres. Since then, many aspects of normal life have come to a stop! Schools and universities have closed, and so have bars and restaurants etc. The streets all over the country are almost empty. Sadly, people have started panic-buying in supermarkets, leaving empty shelves and making it almost impossible for health workers and others to buy food and other necessary things for themselves.

The panic buying aggravate the situation and soon after lifting the curfew people without much thinking, without keeping the rule of distancing go for panic buying, super markets are crowded with people and shelves are empty, big lines on petrol stations and so on. All these behaviours are in spite of adequate awareness on media.

Our national churches have also decided to stop holding Sunday services and other meetings, and so we have also done this in our local churches. Happily, some churches have started working towards providing an on-line alternatives but some do not have access to such facilities.

Most of the People effected are; who have been used to survive on daily income basis and since they do not have any work in current, it has effected the families. Since government also do not have proper programme to assist them, as a church at least we need to look after our own people who are affected with their daily income with whatever the available facilities to us.

We are actually self-isolating ourselves at the moment. The week before last, Dhammi (my wife) developed a sore throat and headache. However, she doesn't have a cough or a fever or high temperature, so it may not be anything to do with coronavirus. I myself developed a bit of a cough at the beginning of last week, not really any different from what I often get. I don't have a high temperature either, so again it may be nothing to do with coronavirus. But the strong Government advice last week was for anyone with even mild symptoms to isolate themselves at home, so that is what we are doing, hopefully only until the end of the week that has just started. We have other friends in our church and community who are older and more vulnerable than we are - some with heart or respiratory problems - and we are concerned for them.

This morning Dhammi has gone for the office to arrange staff salaries as Police has lifted the curfew for six hours. Tharuka and Deveka (our sons) also gone for two hours work. Nayomi, Kushan and little Keshone (our daughter, son-in-law and grandson) also nearby and we are very cautious about the little one. All the parishioners are keeping safe. As we are about to celebrate 175th anniversary of the church there are a lot of preparatory work and so on. Amidst of everything God is communicating quite different message to people of our time who are extremely busy with so many things around the lives (most of the things are not necessary). So far God is extremely gracious on us and our only hope and prayer is, not for anything, but the continuation of His mercies upon us as well as on entire mankind.

So do please let us know how you all are, and how other friends are doing. You are all very much in our thoughts and our prayers at this incredibly difficult time for the whole world.

'Covid 19 will not have power over any of you and your loved ones in Jesus name' Stay safe under the wings of the Lord.

With best wishes and prayers,
Saman +Dhammi.

Rev. Saman Perera, Moderator of the Presbytery of Lanka. Sri Lanka. Sent from my iPad