



*Pastor Dan & Michiko Mandigo; children L to R
Jesse(18), Justin(16), Jonathan(13), Kiyomi(11)*

My family and I moved from upstate New York and arrived at Noelridge Park Church, Cedar Rapids, IA in October 2020. The transition was a great joy because the people at Noelridge were wonderful. Since settling at the church I have made several observations concerning Covid.

The first item on my list was to meet and get to know everyone at church. This was difficult for a couple of reasons. First, we arrived after Covid had been a crisis for several months and 50% of the church was quarantining. Second, my wife and I contracted Covid which lasted for two weeks. This further slowed the *meet and greet* process. I adapted by calling members, sending Christmas cards, making video messages, and encouraging them to pray and consider returning to church.

I also witnessed two different responses to Covid and church life.

One group is concerned about Covid and avoids church. The other group does not view it as threatening and continues to attend. Interestingly the least vulnerable are young people, yet they are the ones who are mostly staying home. And the most vulnerable are the elderly who are mostly attending. Because there was plenty of fodder for criticism to feed on, my concern was that there be no division. Love and respect for each other's position was to be employed. Thankfully I found that our church is filled with flexible and respectful people.

Curiously, our youth and AWANA groups have been full. It may be because almost all of them are unchurched kids who come from broken homes. I think the young families in our church feel an obligation to protect their children from getting Covid and as a result they do not attend.

Ironically, Covid is forcing many churches to update their media ministries. Instead of the typical audio recordings of the services online more churches are now doing video livestreaming. This not only ministers to those in the church who are locking down, but it also gives the community a better visual connection with the church.

The politicizing of Covid has created an opportunity to connect with law enforcement. There have been unconstitutional mandates given by some state governors which infringe on the freedoms of its citizens. The Elders and I are meeting with the Cedar Rapids police chief to discuss his God-given authority and responsibility to protect our citizens in the event he receives such unjust orders from superior magistrates. We will also be giving him a book called **The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates** by Matthew Trewhella.

Overall, my message to our church is that no matter what is happening in our world we are to stay on mission – the Great Commission. The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and making and baptizing disciples. The saints are to be trained for ministry, use their spiritual gifts to serve the body, worship, fellowship, evangelize, pray, discipline, and celebrate the Lord's Supper together (Ma 28:18-20; Ac 1:8; 2:42-47; Ep 4:11-16; Ro 12:6; 1 Cor 12). These cannot be accomplished effectively online. Virtual relating is not what God intended for the church. Although those with underlying conditions, especially the elderly, must be careful, we must also remember that we are not to neglect meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25). It is a blessing that God has allowed me to shepherd such wonderful people concerning all these matters at Noelridge Park Church.

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