

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

Spring Newsletter



3/13

I started the day like any other Friday and was planning on meeting with a couple youth later that afternoon. Around noon I had my phone open and saw an email from one of the assistant directors at Juvenile Hall. When I saw the two words “effective immediately” in red, I knew it wasn’t good news. As our religious liaison, she was letting us know that all ministry was being canceled for the weekend and that the situation would be re-evaluated on Monday.

I called and spoke to Chaplain Steve Lowe who told me to communicate the news to all of the PCM staff and volunteers. This was done via email and several of them quickly responded back about the news.

Since I had the time, I went to Costco to pick up my normal products. The line to get in the door wrapped around the side of the building (60 yards) but only took 15 minutes to get in. Since there was a limited number of customers inside and I didn’t need toilet paper, I was out the front in another 15 minutes. As I was walking to my car, Chaplain Sheri called to inform me that the probation department had posted a press release on their Facebook page that said visiting was cancelled until further notice.

When I got home, I called Unit 400 at the Youth Guidance Center and was allowed to talk to Tray. I have been meeting with him weekly and planned to connect in person that afternoon. It sounded like he had already been told about the situation and understood me not being there.

I texted Pastor Santos at Streetlight Church to see if their Friday evening service was still taking place and he said it was. Since the amount of people *who* attend is small, I decided to show up. His team was sanitizing the door handles, etc. when I arrived which was a good sign.

Over a year ago, I started taking Johnny to Streetlight Church and then his parents started attending the Spanish Service that occurs at the same time as the English ones. Johnny no longer attends but his mother does and found me afterwards. She was happy to see me and was hoping I would attend Johnny’s 19th birthday party on Monday evening. I am glad I went to the service.

3/14

Chaplain Steve sent out a group email to his staff informing us to be safe and cautious. He told us to be wise and let God work in our absence. The pandemic may do more to make hearts tender to important things than our personal ministry. He said our most important work may lie before us.

One of the PYCM staff in Texas (Don Anderson) called me in the morning to see how I was doing. Some of the prisons and jails he ministers in are also not allowing visitors and collaborative staff.

I called Unit B to line up a time to call Nathaniel and was told to call at 5:35 pm. Nathaniel is only 14 and kept filling out religious request slips to meet with a chaplain when he was first arrested. So, when I asked if he wanted to meet for discipleship, he said “yes”. During our call he said that everything is fine and when I asked him about school being held on Monday, he said he didn’t know.

3/15

A church that supports me (Revive Covenant) has a small congregation and was holding their normal service (with some precautions). I have been their missionary for 25 years and feel connected there. The pastor and I had just met for coffee last week. The church administrator had served with me a few times and is moving to Arizona with her husband. This was their last Sunday, so I wanted to be able to sign her goodbye card and thank her.

I went back to Streetlight Church for their evening service and noticed a few more people in attendance than usual.

Leonel texted me a YouTube video that was made to create fear and ten seconds into it, I could tell the person was speaking like a false prophet. We ended up talking on the phone and at the end of our conversation, he told me he was feeling better. He struggles with a lot of fear even without the Coronavirus and the things his friends have been sending him are all negative. Leonel shared that his pastor had spoken that morning about how Elijah became fearful of Queen Jezebel and isolated himself.

Eric also called this evening to let me know he has been at the Victory Outreach Men’s Home for seven months and I set up a time to see him tomorrow.

3/16

I had lined up a lunch meeting last week with a retired supervisor (Victor) at the Youth Guidance Center. Victor had been a huge support to our ministry and I had been wanting to meet for lunch for a long time. He has been taking some training in the area of spiritual deliverance and a couple of the situations he was involved with were pretty amazing. After we prayed together, Victor said, "I sense the Lord giving me two words for you; rest and refocus."

On my way back from lunch, Chaplain Sheri called me about an email from the assistant director at Juvenile Hall. We are now restricted from the facilities until April 6th so I had to inform my guests that the Easter Outreach on April 4th was cancelled. We were asked about recording a virtual church service so I sent back an email to the assistant director about how it would be presented and how I would get the recording to her.

I went by the Victory Outreach Men's Home in Garden Grove to meet with Eric at 2:15 pm. Since he is the cook for the home, we met for over an hour at the kitchen table. He told me about his continued depression and mentioned his uncle's visits. This is the only family support he has. He will complete the program in August and then go to one of the VO Urban Training Centers for six months.

On my way home, I was listening to the end of Pastor's Perspective on KWVE. It was a special edition that focused on the Coronavirus. The doctor who was being interviewed said that everyone should be considered a possible carrier at this time and limiting the amount of people you are around is the best way to prevent the virus from spreading. The Health Care website shared that another person in Orange County had gotten the virus due to community spread, so I decided not to attend Johnny's party.

I called Johnny to wish him a happy birthday and found out he was still at work. He asked if we could meet for coffee in the morning. I told him that his mom invited me over but that I would rather just meet with him alone in the morning since he will get plenty of family attention tonight. After the call I headed to the laundry room to wash my clothes.

3/17

As I drove to pick Johnny up, I realized I should have let him meet me there instead. We got our coffee and then practiced social distancing while we talked. He is living with his girlfriend and shared his plan to get married. I have had past conversations with him about fornication so that is why he brought up the subject. Johnny plans to attend Streetlight Church again when they are able to hold services.

After dropping Johnny off, I headed over to Theo Lacy Jail to see if official visits could take place through the glass. I had received a call from Curtis and told him I would see him as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the lobby area was closed to everyone except employees. The jail website said that inmates are being given two free phone calls a day.

At home, I received a call from Chaplain Sheri saying the probation volunteer coordinator told her that the lockdown at the facilities will be extended to April 17th. She had contacted her church about video-taping the virtual service there if needed and wanted me to call the associate pastor to explain what I would need.

In the early evening I called Unit Q at Juvenile Hall and was able to talk and pray with Ramiro. He has been attending our services for over a year and doing discipleship with one of our volunteers. Ramiro talked like everything was fairly normal inside the facility.

3/18

I received an email asking me to join the management meeting for Juvenile Hall and the Youth Leadership Academy via a conference call at one o'clock. Each of the collaboratives were allowed to give their updates. I shared that I appreciate the staff allowing me to speak to certain youth over the phone and asked for permission to place new bibles on our office desk for the staff to distribute as needed. There was also a discussion about the virtual church services being conducted.

In mid-afternoon, I was allowed inside our Juvenile Hall office only to take care of some office responsibilities. The bibles were stacked on the desk and a note was placed on the door for the staff to see. I hadn't heard from Damian for a long time but sent him a letter in prison last December. When I got our mail, there was an encouraging letter from him. It felt strange to be at the facility but not able to go down to the units.

At home, I called Unit T and asked to speak with Oscar who I have met with on Wednesdays for over a year. He told me that he got better news in court and that everything was fine. He asked how I was doing which I appreciated. I spent the evening preparing a message to be video-taped tomorrow and the slides that will be presented along with it.

3/19

At one o'clock, I met Chaplain Sheri at CC Refuge in Huntington Beach and set up my video camera in the Junior High room in front of a flat screen television. The first recording of the virtual church service took about 20 minutes and then Sheri gave an 8-minute gospel presentation (see photo). Since we had time, I decided to do a "take two" and felt the presentation went better the second time.



At home I began to edit the project on iMovie and added a song and other graphics at the beginning and end. I tried to email the video to the assistant directors of each facility, but it didn't work. So, I uploaded the content onto my YouTube channel and sent them a link. The 27-minute presentation is also on the PCM Facebook page and has had over 60 views.

Around 5:30 pm, I walked over to Albertson's to pick up a few things. I could not believe how empty the shelves were but was able to get almost everything I needed for another week. I needed two bags of broccoli and there were exactly two bags left.

Leonel has continued to work at California Waters and wanted to meet at our normal time. At 7:30 pm, I drove to his apartment and practiced social distancing in his garage. We met for two hours and were able to continue working through my trauma workbook. I reminded Leonel of how God has blessed him and how a million other men around the world would feel relieved and thrilled if they had the life he has.

3/20

Today the Governor of California put out a stay at home order with the normal exceptions. Chaplain Steve sent out another encouraging email to all the PYCM staff urging us to stay connected to each other. He is looking into video conferencing so he can have an online staff meeting with all Pacific Youth staff which will be a "first" for the ministry. The photo below was taken during the trial run with a few of us in Orange County.



Around mid-afternoon I started getting emails from the facilities about using google duo for our church services. I downloaded the app and did a practice video that I sent to five people. I also had Chaplain Steve Matten play guitar over the app so I could see how it sounds.

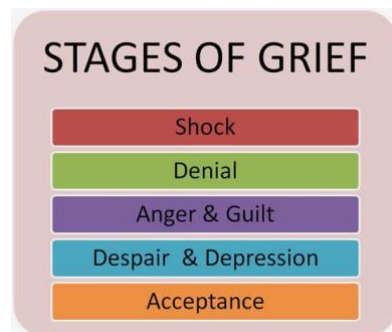
The staff at each facility are doing all that they can to keep a normal schedule and it looks like I will be holding three virtual church services per week. At least the youth will be able to see and hear me live and I will be able to see them. For this coming Sunday, the video I sent is supposed to be shown. One of the supervisors downloaded it and copied it on two DVD's to be shown at YLA!

In the evening, I called Edwin at the Youth Guidance Center. He didn't mind having his movie interrupted and said that he misses our one on ones.

What Now?

I made it through Week One but it looks like there will be a few more to deal with. The national response to the Coronavirus came as a shock. Along with shock comes denial. I was definitely in denial for a couple days until the seriousness of the situation sank in. During the denial stage, people try to explain the crisis or come up with a conspiracy theory that takes away the threat.

Most of us are going through the stages of grief and loss. The normal life we had is lost for now and it will take time to adjust to reality. Denial will lead to anger, anger will lead to depression, but depression will finally lead to acceptance.



As long as I take one day at a time, I am doing well. I am thankful to have some ministry responsibilities at this time and appreciate all that the probation staff are doing to have as normal of schedule for the youth as possible. I am able to see the youth as they attend church at their three locations and interact with them. Chaplain Sheri is creating a weekly newsletter that is able to be handed out as well.

Most of the units have access to an iPad or iPhone, so I am hoping to be able to hold one on ones using Facetime soon. Aftercare has also continued over the phone or in person with two individuals because we are able to meet outside and stay six feet apart.

APRIL PRAYER LETTER



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Chaplain Sheri sponsored an outreach activity with the girls in Unit 300 at the Youth Guidance Center. It was the last activity we did before we were denied access. The ladies who shared were all from Northeast of the Well. Lauren (far left) has an amazing voice and was asked to sing a couple worship songs. Staff from other units could hear it and came to see who the amazing voice belonged to. Some of the girls wrote thank you cards to express their appreciation (see below).

INSIGHT OF THE MONTH

The Christian life is a relationship with God. It's like going from being single to being married. Marriage connects you to your spouse and you begin to learn how to share life together. When a husband or wife is invited to do something, the right thing to say is, "Let me check with my spouse." This is how every believer needs to treat the Lord as well.

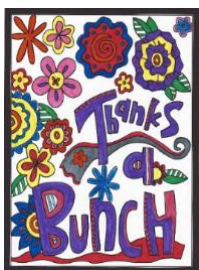
QUOTES OF THE MONTH

There are two days of the week you don't have to worry about, yesterday and tomorrow.

Unknown

Light isn't at the end of the tunnel because it is with you through the tunnel.

Pastor Mike Sciarra



PRAISES

For 23 youth being able to attend the movie outreach last month when I showed "Breakthrough" at YGC and YLA.

For **Larry Wheeland** (probation officer) mentioning how much worth he feels our ministry has to the department. He was speaking to a large crowd at his retirement luncheon that I was invited to.

REQUESTS FOR YOUTH

Angel (Santa Ana) has never been on probation but is the son of someone who has. His dad asked me to meet with him when possible so now I have plenty of time to do it. We are working through my pamphlet called, "What is a Man?" Pray for the Lord to continue to bless this interaction. He lives across the street so we meet in my pool area.

Christian (Solano State Prison) finally got out of Pelican Bay State Prison and calls regularly. The extra privileges he gets now mean a lot to him. He got a job in the kitchen that pays 30 cents an hour. Pray that he will connect with other believers there. Prison Fellowship has a program there (TUMI) that he started in Pelican Bay and hopes to complete.

Daniel (Santa Ana) has continued to text and call me once in a while. He went back to the DMV and passed his written test and is working with his dad throughout the week. Pray that he will identify with other believers and continue to grow spiritually. He needs to stay disconnected to his old gang.

Joshua (Brea) has been working extra hard at Whole Foods but doing well. We met earlier in the month and he shared how the Lord is leading him away from Chapman University and into the ministry! Continue to pray for the Lord's protection on his life.

Leonel (Anaheim) has been worrying about catching the Coronavirus but learning to trust God more. He is able to keep working and his wife is able to work from home. They are watching their church service online. Pray for the Lord to continue to bless our weekly sessions.

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