



IBCM Network exists to serve the international Brethren community through:
strengthening leaders, encouraging churches, facilitating mission and connecting worldwide.

WELCOME TO THE IBCM NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Issue 2: April 2020

IAN BURNES | CHAIRMAN, IBCM NETWORK



Our second newsletter comes to you in the middle of circumstances that none of us could have anticipated just a few weeks ago. I would image that very few of us have lived before in a lock-down situation where we are advised to stay at home, keep our distance from all human contact and that this, certainly here in the UK, is likely to last for 12 weeks or more! And the risk is certainly not theoretical. Two of our IBCM Network team live in Italy and Sanja Zurovac, our administrator is just recovering from an illness as I write and has been in isolation in her room for two weeks.

Although we cannot meet physically, we are so grateful that we live in an age where modern technology allows us to meet remotely and communicate online. Many are meeting online ourselves through Zoom or another platform to chat, encourage each other, to pray and even to have board meetings, as we did recently as an IBCM Network board. Local churches are trying to set up online services so isolated members of the congregation can come together, and this will be so important in the weeks ahead. The Internet can be a mixed blessing but thank God for its communication possibilities. They can make international prayer meetings a reality!

Inevitably some Regional conferences are going to be casualties, at least this year of the travel ban, and details are included with our news. It is hoped that these can be run in 2021, and with what is being planned this looks like a busy year. However, as our part-time staff are home based, their work is not restricted and so Sanja and David have been busy updating data bases, the IBCM Network website gathering information from around the world, and planning future events, all from their own home-based offices.

I am sure that we are all praying that by the time the next of our news updates is circulated, Coronavirus will be declining and life beginning to return to normal, although that could take much longer than we anticipate. How grateful we are for our Sovereign God to whom we can turn in these difficult days.

FAITH OR FEAR?

DAVID SMITH | INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR, IBCM NETWORK



Whatever else it is, the worldwide pandemic of the coronavirus is a wakeup call to all. It affects everyone, young and old, weak and strong, rich and poor. We are all affected even if not infected.

Many will ask "What is God saying through all of this?" But that is the wrong question. That question wants to somehow link the virus to God's voice, as if he has specifically sent an additional curse on the world that is not linked to his original response to sin. The right question I believe is "What is our response to the situation we now find ourselves in?"

What did Jesus say after he told the anxious disciples he would be leaving them, sending his Spirit, but would return? He said "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus states:

Unavoidable fact: In this world you will have trouble

Strong Encouragement: But take heart

Certain Promise: I have overcome the world

Intended Result: So that you may have peace

In this world you will have trouble

In other words we should not be surprised by the coronavirus any more than by any other trouble that has ventured upon this broken and decaying planet. It not only needs renewal but is looking forward to it. The coronavirus is just another sign that we

are not in heaven yet and that the world is groaning, awaiting its coming transformation (Romans 8:19-22).

I have overcome the world

But sin, disease and the curse has not won. We along with this groaning world are awaiting the final glorious transformation into newness. (Romans 8:22). We know that Christ has overcome all through his amazing loving sacrifice for us. We know that he is victorious over sin, death, and the grave. We know that he will return and wipe every tear from our eyes, that there will be no more mourning, or crying, or pain. For the old will pass away and He will make everything new (Revelation 21:4).

It's like watching a football game again. The first time you watch you are anxious for your team, will they win, or won't they. You sit in the edge of your seat, heart pounding. But when you know they have won and then you watch a replay of the match, you sit peacefully, enjoying the moment because you know exactly how it all works out. With God we know the end before it happens, he has overcome.

But take heart

So we take heart, right now, in the midst of all this chaos, we take heart. We trust. We have faith. Do we? This is where we return to the most important question ""What is our response to the situation we now find ourselves in?" Faith or fear? Do we take heart, having faith, living in the certain knowledge that no matter what God has us in his hands? Or do we live out of fear, relentlessly trying keep control of our lives, stockpiling toilet paper, just in case, believing that God has not overcome.

So that you may have peace

Simply put what do we believe? Will the world overcome us? Will the coronavirus bring the end of existence as we know it? Do we operate out of fear and panic now that we have apparently lost control over our lives? Or knowing that God has got everything firmly in his hands, and that what we are experiencing is nothing more than a sign of a groaning world awaiting its transformation, we throw ourselves into his arms, casting all our cares on him.

While we are not oblivious or immune to the suffering, and death, and heartache that the current situation is bringing, like Paul we can say "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Panic or peace? That's the choice. What is your response? Choose peace in the arms

of him who has overcome all. And pass it on – show and tell others these things so that they may have peace.

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

RAPID RESPONSE: DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

NEIL SUMMERTON | TRUSTEE IBCM NETWORK



It has been reported that as many as one-third of the world’s population are at present in some form of lockdown as a result of the spread of a virus which emerged clearly only in December. In many countries, prohibitions extend to church meetings of any size (in the UK, meetings of more than 2 people not belonging to the same household (not family) are now unlawful, following legislation enacted in Parliament on 25 March). This raises a great challenge to Christians: how are we to go about the business of sustaining church life, propagating the gospel, and doing good to and for others?

Many local churches are small: if they simply go into hibernation for an extended period—possibly months, rather than just until Easter—will they ever be able to wake up again. Even much larger churches may find that a good many of those in fellowship

have lost the habit of meeting, and even the habit of living as Christians, especially when they have lost loved ones in an apparently random and capricious way (none of us should take the continuance of faith for granted in adverse personal circumstances, certainly not in the absence of the pastoral support and fellowship of fellow believers).

Circumstances and opportunities will vary between different parts of the world. But it's already clear that in many places, the tools that we have in our pockets, in our living rooms, and workrooms can be used to enable us to meet virtually as churches, in small groups and one-to-one, to give pastoral care, and to carry on spreading the gospel. Indeed, it may be lot easier to invite non-Christians to join in an electronic church or home group meeting, or to invite them to a Bible study, or watch and listen to a gospel address, than it is to persuade them to come to, for example, a church 'service'.

I am heartened about how quickly people in many different countries are spontaneously taking up the opportunities of these tools to meet as church fellowships on a regular basis, to study Scripture in online groups, and to make Christ known. The important thing seems to me to be precisely not to try to replicate church 'services' (not a biblical word or possibly even concept—the New Testament uses that word more of giving to the poor), but to use the opportunities and possibilities of electronic media to do things a bit differently and more effectively.

As I say, people are finding their own way to effective use of the possibilities, as are organisations, and they are being remarkably inventive. But let me recommend to you suggestions and advice which are on the website Partnership (UK) (<https://partnershipuk.org/covid19/>) about being church under COVID-19 lockdown, and/or ask Biblical Eldership Resources (USA) (<https://www.biblicaleldership.com/>) if you can see their latest e-newsletter item on 'How to Do Church When You Can't Get to Church'.

Then there is the important question of what we can do to help others under a legislated lockdown, just as the church of the first centuries astounded their pagan neighbours by their willingness to walk towards the danger in order to nurse others, rather than to flee to the country, in time of plague (the prohibitory reach of the Roman power was less than that of the modern state). In the UK, the government has asked for volunteers to help its health service, and nearly 700,000 citizens have volunteered in just three or four days (the residual influence of Christian morality in our society). How can we Christians do less than they are doing?

UPDATES AND PRAYER REQUESTS



FARES MARZONE | TRUSTEE IBCM NETWORK, ITALY

Pray for the situation in Italy

Up to now almost 90,000 people have been affected, but the figure is lower than the real one because not all who have fever or other symptoms are included. However more than 10,000 have recovered but more than 9,134 died amongst whom 44 medical doctors. Journalists and local authorities say that the figure of the deaths should be higher as many die at home and are not inserted in the official figures. prayers, and those of other brothers too, are much appreciated. We should reach the peak in the next few days/next week, but who knows?

The situation among the believers

Four believers went to be with the Lord. Their age was: 95, 80, 73, 50. Even if the relatives who remain are believers and rest on the Lord's promises, there is grief, because they couldn't be with them from the day of their hospitalisation and there has been no funeral, which is always a great occasion of comfort and an opportunity to preach the gospel. Two brothers, one of whom is a cardiologist, and one sister a medical doctor who works in a hospital, too, in their late 40's, got pneumonia, are in hospital. Thankfully the conditions of the two brothers are stable but not those of the sister. A nurse in her mid-twenties is also affected along with many others. Two of our elders, and one brother from the worst affected area had problems: two of them were

in hospital but are now at home, one didn't need hospitalisation. The good news has been the arrival of a Camp Hospital from USA. It's organised and run by medical doctors and nurses, all believers, who belong to the Samaritan Purse. It opened few days ago and is working intensively having made a great impression to the local community and beyond.

Prayer requests

Prayers are needed for our beloved fellow believers who work in hospitals as doctors (several), nurses (many) or technicians, and also for those who work as bus drivers, trains conductors, etc. And, generally speaking, for our country so that people may be eager to listen to the gospel being preached in many ways with the mass media. Amongst this turmoil we are having great opportunities to evangelize through tracts sent via email, phone calls, articles in websites etc. **We are praying for a revival firstly in our lives, in our assemblies, and amongst our fellow citizens.**

In this testing time we, as local assemblies, are linked in many ways thanks to technology: e.g. radio brocasts and streaming. Almost all the assemblies have a system in which they "gather" virtually at the same time to listen to the preaching of the Word and many participate at the Lord's Supper in their own homes with their families. **Please pray that we all stay connected in Christ.**

Our desire is to remain firm on the solid ground and on the Lord's promises. Thank you for your prayers: we need them and we feel them, too. **Let's pray for one another till we'll be all together with no restrictions to sing and worship the Lamb of God! And for eternity!**

27th March 2020

**ABRAHAM THOMAS | INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP, IBCM NETWORK,
INDIA**

Coronavirus in India

The total number of confirmed cases in India is 649. The Union Health Ministry has said that 43 people have recovered so far, but 13 have died. Today is the second day of the 21-day nationwide lockdown. Last Sunday (22nd March 2020) most of our assemblies (around 4000) across India were barred from having Sunday Worship due to increasing coronavirus cases in India. India is now in stage three of the crisis. Prime Minister declared 21 days of complete lockdown of the country. No flights, no train, no

bus. All schools, Colleges, companies are closed. Essential services like hospitals, grocery stores and vegetable stores remain opened. IT companies' employees work from home. Most of the states enforce Stay Home and movement is restricted.

Coronavirus in Kerala

Kerala reports 19 fresh cases of coronavirus, taking total under treatment to 126. First death was reported. Many of our believers are working in hospitals (they include doctors and hundreds of nurses). Same situation is for the Indian believers in many countries.

Please pray for the people directly involved in the health care of the patients.

Kerala State with majority assemblies is the most hit by the virus. Main cities are badly affected. The assemblies cannot meet during the lockdown period. Most of the assemblies are not equipped to have online services especially the assemblies in the rural areas. So please pray that the spread of the virus may be contained and for the medical personnel (mostly Christians) who are working in the forefront.

Pray that the assemblies may use this opportunity to show care and compassion through practical services.

27th March 2020

MARK GRACE | CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND

Today New Zealand is into the second day of a four week lock down. All non-essential businesses are closed. Everyone has been asked to stay in their homes, and only to travel for the essentials of food and petrol. Today there are 368 cases of Covid-19 and it's likely to climb into the thousands over the next 10 days.

Please pray that the 180 Churches, 20 campsites and 20+ support ministries we seek to serve in New Zealand, find ways to point people to Jesus, through the gospel from the scriptures throughout the Pandemic.

27th March 2020

LEWIS URIRI | CMML ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe has five official "imported" cases of COVID-19. One has passed on. Four are said to be recovering well. Available data points to existing local transmission.

It appears that we have no capacity to contain and mitigate a generalised outbreak. There is a general lack of protective equipment for health workers. Government says that there are about 10,000 protective suits for all public hospitals, 100,000 masks and USD 3,000,000 to cater for a population of about 14,000,000.00. Doctors and nurses have gone on strike citing “incapacitation”. Private hospitals are outside the means of most of the population. The main isolation centre has just been renovated by the Chinese who have come in to help. A few other centres are being set up and it said these will be functional in 3-6 weeks. Borders with all neighbouring countries have been closed except for cargo.

A State of Disaster has been declared across the whole of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe goes into total lockdown for 21 days starting from Monday 20 March 2020, subject to review. The USD has been reintroduced as legal tender at a fixed exchange rate of USD1:25 ZWL. The majority of Zimbabweans live from hand to mouth and on less than USD1 per day. The reintroduction of the USD will in the short term more likely cause immediate increased suffering for the vast majority of the population. A total lockdown, such as has been decreed, will no doubt bring untold hardship and suffering for most Zimbabweans.

Pray for the capacitation of health workers and the containment of local transmission. Pray, further, that the majority of Zimbabweans may have at least a meal a day during the lockdown period.

27th March 2020

ELISEO CASAL | COORDINADORA DE ASAMBLEAS DE HERMANOS, SPAIN

The latest official figures in Spain are: 64,059 confirmed cases, 4,858 deaths, 7,871 new cases before yesterday. A high percentage of those affected are health personnel. Goods such as masks or respirators are missing. We are in confinement and you can only go outside for basic purchases. They are not ruling out more severe measures. Churches hold meetings virtually. In our case there are positive things, the virtual prayer meeting, by Zoom, now brings together twice as many brothers, more than eighty people connected. Several leaders and elders have been affected but none has died. In general, we are now more connected using all social networks and by one means or another there is daily communication. I am convinced that this experience brings important lessons for us as God's people and focuses us on what is relevant. A hug and thanks for your prayers!

Please pray: 1) for the church to communicate light and hope in Christ 2) for God to provide for each family as there are many temporary layoffs.

28th March 2020

**WILLYAM MALOCEVICH | FUNDACION EVANGELICA MISIONERA,
PARAGUAY**

In Paraguay the number of infected is 52 so far and 3 dead (official). The first to die was a doctor from the Baptist Medical Center and the second one who was also in therapy was a doctor from the same hospital. Three Paraguayans have already died in Spain. Our president has taken urgent curfew measures, financial support for the poorest population... above all, he spoke openly of his faith in Christ and invites the population to address the problem "on their knees."

Plans are to urgently build two specialized hospitals. I am associated with ASIEP (Association of Evangelical Churches of Paraguay) and APEP (Association of Evangelical Pastors of Paraguay) and we have no reports of brothers who are sick.

These associations are promoting and coordinating fasting and prayer throughout the country.

- **We pray that the pandemic will stop before winter**
- **We pray for revival in the churches**
- **We pray that the virus does not affect the interior of the country and the indigenous people**

A hug and blessings, from Paraguay.

28th March 2020

JOEL HERNANDEZ | IBCM TRUSTEE, USA

In the USA there have been 104,671 confirmed cases, with 1,711 fatalities. The states that have been most affected are New York and New Jersey. Each of the states have enacted their own measures, some stricter than others. Many of the assemblies here have resorted to online services, with encouraging results despite physical distance. Emmaus Bible College, as many other universities have done, have sent their students home and we continue having classes online.

We are praying for revival in our hearts, our churches, and our nation, that the

Lord will use this global pandemic to bring the hearts of many back to Him.

28th March 2020



WEBSITE

Connect

Through IBCM Network and our website you can connect with the Brethren from all the nations. Please check our website at <https://www.ibcm.net/>, or send us a prayer request for your country at ibcm@ibcm.net.

Donate

We need your help to keep us all connected. If you would like to support the work of IBCM Network financially please go to <https://www.ibcm.net/donations/>

Thank you for your prayers and support.



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