

A Letter to the People of Rockingham County and the Greater Community of the Central
Shenandoah Valley

March 25, 2020

Greetings to all. I wish to express some thoughts to our citizens regarding the COVID 19 Crisis and our response to it. First of all please note, that if you or someone you know may have any signs or symptoms of the Coronavirus, please contact your personal physician or the nearest medical facility by phone or email for further instructions. If you feel it necessary to physically go to a medical facility please call in advance so they are aware of your pending arrival and can instruct you on how to safely and responsibly enter their facilities. Some of you may be thinking that you are "over reacting," but please think of it as being cautious and responsible.

I heard the following in a sermon delivered this past Sunday from the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. (online of course), that has great significance to the times in which we are living today. It's a passage from J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings about when a reluctant young hero, Frodo, confesses to his mentor Gandolf, "I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened." Gandolf replies, "So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us." Gandolf goes on, "There are other forces at work in the world, Frodo, besides the will of evil."

The Board of Supervisors wants our community to know that we have full trust and confidence in our County's administration, and all of its departments and employees. We also have full faith and trust in the abilities of those assisting the County and the community during the COVID 19 crisis. We are partnering with Sentara-RMH, our colleagues in the City of Harrisonburg and surrounding towns and counties. The Governor and State agencies are fully engaged in assisting us, as are our elected State officials, our various faith communities and other local organizations and businesses. Each are continuing to do their part to mitigate and move through the pandemic.

I believe it is important to remind ourselves of several things today and in the coming days as we progress through, and eventually out of this crisis. First, let's remind ourselves that we have a local history with the dangers of highly contagious viruses. Over the past forty years we have learned a great deal from our Agri-buisness community, particularly the poultry industry on how to deal with this. They have, from time-to-time, had to face the highly contagious nature of Avian Influenza. Their responses when faced with new outbreaks, including containment, sanitation, and isolation, are the very same things our medical experts are asking us to do with COVID 19. It's a simple ask of all of us. It is the responsible and right

thing to do. Maintain our social distance, wash our hands frequently and thoroughly, and if signs or symptoms are present, isolate ourselves from everyone else to prevent the spread. A virus has a life of its own and is very adaptable, thus it can mutate into a stronger more contagious and deadly form faster than we can sometimes react.

So here is our BIG ASK:

1. Please listen to and abide by all the medical recommendations being presented.
2. Please listen to and abide by all the governmental requests.
3. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ANY SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS OF COVID 19, call your doctor and or some medical authority to seek advice on your next steps. Avoid showing up to any medical provider unannounced. Please call them before you arrive to receive instructions on how to safely and responsibly enter any medical facility.
4. Only use local emergency services for true, life-threatening situations. They are a scarce resource and need to be preserved for the most serious emergencies. If you can handle the emergency yourself, please do so, otherwise call 911.
5. SEEK OUT THE FACTS- There are many rumors and mistruths being presented. You can find information online from trusted and verified information sites such as the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Coronavirus Response Hub for Rockingham County, and the Center For Disease Control (CDC) at;
<https://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/>
6. Help where and if you can:
 - a. If you have a low risk to COVID 19 and have the ability to volunteer your time and or you possess certain skills and training such as being an EMT or have had any firefighting training, consider joining a local fire department or rescue squad;
 - b. If you have a low risk to COVID 19 and have the ability to volunteer your time consider volunteering at a local food bank or the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. Many of their volunteers are in the identified high risk categories and thus have been advised to stay at home.
 - c. Purchase if you can, online products and or gift certificates from local merchants in our community. If not immediately, you can certainly use those gift certificates once we get beyond COVID 19.
 - d. Purchase for pickup or delivery once or twice a week, a meal from a local eatery. Also please look to support other local businesses that have limited ability to sell products such as local wineries, breweries, creameries, etc.

- e. Continue to support, with whatever means available to you, local charities and non-profit organizations that provide valuable services to our community throughout the year.
- f. If you are a high school student or an at home college student, consider offering childcare for you neighbors who are essential workers and are needed to be at work to help take care of us. Many of those essential workers really need your help.
- g. Consider sending your personal care provider, (Barber, Hair Stylists, Cleaning Service, etc.,) a check as if you were still receiving their services. They are shutdown now and need our help.
- h. Continue to practice your faith by whatever means you feel comfortable with. Most local faith communities have devised virtual or online means by which to continue their worship services.
- i. Fill out your CENSUS FORMS PLEASE!!!!!!

The list can go on and on. Please feel free to add more to it as I'm sure I'm missing many. This is a great time to be creative and to invent, to share and to care. We must continue keeping and building our relationships with each other and to put aside our personal desires and demands. It is our social duty and responsibility to each other.

This is a time, a blessing even, to bring a divided people and nation together- to weather the storm- to keep hope evermore present in our lives today, most certainly in our future tomorrows. This is a time that demands that we not slip into the obscure and fade away in the pages of history, rather to rise to the occasion and meet the challenge, and thus build a better tomorrow. We have an opportunity to forge a new "great generation." Let us not fail in trying. This is a time for us to understand grace and let it consume our hearts, our souls, our words, and our acts.

Our relationships with each other have always been important, but are even more so today. They can- and do- affect our vision. We really can't see one another clearly if we aren't in a relationship with each other, and the result very well could be that we lose the needed perspective others may have. C.S. Lewis wrote- "What you see depends a great deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are." Today- and in the coming days, our character is being tested and likely reshaped. Just like other major historical events, humankind finds itself at a critical crossroad, and if history is correct, humankind will be altered and it will adapt. We survive, we move on. We will all be good at the end of this crisis- this I know.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors and the City Council, we want to thank each and every one of you for patience, your understanding, your contributions and your

sacrifices to date. I think I can speak for all of your elected officials locally when we ask you for your prayers. Prayers for those afflicted, those who respond and are the caretakers, those who are doing the research and who are discovering the means by which we will win this battle. Prayers for all of our government leaders no matter their politics at all levels, who have to make decisions during tough times. And especially, we send out prayers for our families, friends, neighbors, and ourselves.

I'll leave you with a quote taken originally from George Bernard Shaw and then readapted to more modern times by Robert F. Kennedy- "Some men see things as they are and say why; I dream things that never were and say why not." God Bless and keep you safe and in peace.

In Peace,

William Kyger, Jr.

Chairman- Rockingham County Board of Supervisors