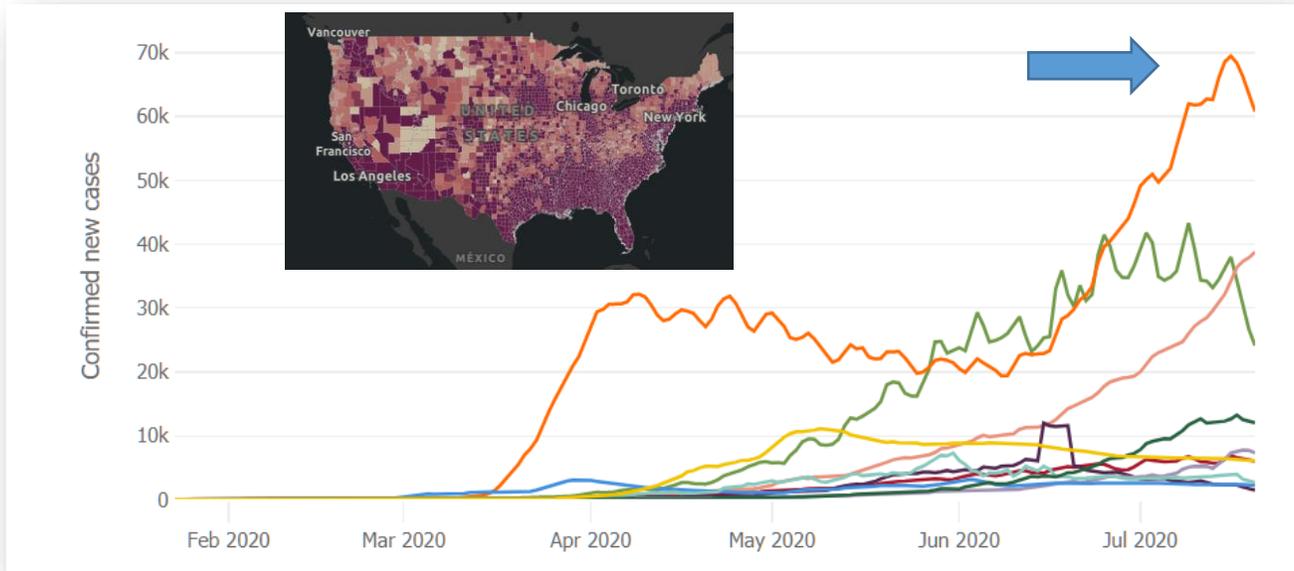


## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

July 21, 2020

Well, here we are, in what I think is week 19 of COVID quarantining, and this is what the Johns Hopkins chart looks like today:



While things will hopefully move back toward a more familiar “normal” once we have a vaccine, it’s hard to know when that might be or what that might look like. So I’ve been thinking about what ministry might look like in a world where masks and social distancing remain the “way to stay alive.” Here’s an idea I’ve been pondering. . . .

You may know that an Aspen grove is on the short list for “the largest living thing that has ever existed on this planet.” The reason for this is that while an Aspen grove contains hundreds of above-ground trunks, the whole grove is really one organism, with complex connections underground.

It seems to me that an Aspen grove might be an apt metaphor for the Body of Christ in the world—for the Church. Using this metaphor, the global, universal Church would be the “underground network” of connections, while individual congregations might be thought of as the “above-ground trunks.”



And it seems to me that an Aspen grove might be a good metaphor for a local congregation through COVID and beyond. Using the same metaphor, the congregation as a whole would be the “underground network” of connections, both in our gathered worship and in our daily lives outside of worship. While we as individual followers of Jesus could be thought of as the “above-ground” trunks of the “CBF Grove,” I’ve had another idea as well.

In New Testament times, and in much of the world, even today, there were/are no large, identifiable church buildings. Believers met/meet in fairly small gatherings in homes:

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**CBF: transforming Oakland Mills into a community others wish to replicate.**

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**Acts 5:42**

*Day after day, in the temple courts and **from house to house**, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.*

**Acts 20:20**

*You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and **from house to house**.*



I've been wondering what might happen if we at CBF returned to that model? What might happen if a number of us began to invite our neighbors and other CBFers to meet in our homes once a week for prayer, discussion, and Bible Study? Such groups would then be the visible, "above-ground" trunks of our A.S.P.E.N. Grove:

**A.S.P.E.N. = A Spiritual Presence  
Enriching Neighborhoods**

Now I know we can't do this right now—we can't meet in homes during COVID. But most of us are gaining confidence with using resources such as *Zoom* and *Google Meet*, and that's how we might start.

There is almost literally no end to the kinds of things A.S.P.E.N. groups could use as resources. A.S.P.E.N. groups could discuss the previous week's sermon, with study notes provided. They could use the kinds of materials we now use in Sunday School. They could do various kinds of small-group Bible studies, of which there are a plethora. Paul put it this way to the Corinthians:

**1 Corinthians 14:26**

*What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*

A.S.P.E.N. groups could do prayer walks in their neighborhoods. They could host block parties. They could provide post-COVID care to neighbors with no faith connections.

If we had several groups, we could have weekly A.S.P.E.N. Leader gatherings for training, ideas, encouragement, and prayer. I get excited thinking about the possibilities!

For starters, I think I'm going to invite the eleven other condo-dwellers in my building to join me for a *Zoom* Bible Study and discussion group. This will be our pilot effort. I'll let you know how it goes!

Dave

