



Friday, March 20, 2020

Dear Friends and Family of Branches,

Since 2007 Branches has faithfully, quietly, resolutely stood as a safe place for people to find healing and hope. We have taken very seriously what we believe to be a call of God or minister to the WHOLE person, mentally, physically, and spiritually. We have been here for our various communities in times of loss, in times of great angst and anxiousness, and in those times when we were corporately trying to find meaning in the messes of life. We are both honored by, and feel a responsibility to, the thousands of people that have counted on Branches to be available in those times of need.

Right now, we are, like everyone in our nation, and around the world, facing uncharted territory. How do we still provide that safe place, more needed than ever before, and at the same time, not contribute to spreading or at the very least, prolonging, this coronavirus that has created such havoc? How can we continue to be part of the solution without becoming a part of the problem?

At Branches, we have been very proactive and have led the way in minimizing the risk of exposure. We have followed the CDC guidelines, offered alternatives to treatment, and of course, we have prayed. Now the time has come for us to take the next logical, and perhaps drastic step to protect you, our clients, patients, and friends. **Beginning Monday, March 23, all Branches locations will conduct only tele-counseling sessions. This includes mental health, weight loss, and medical management.** We will do everything in our power to make those sessions meaningful and productive. Our counselors have spent many hours over the last few weeks talking about the ethics and efficacy of such sessions. I believe you will be pleased with how well these sessions go. We will continue this until the CDC lifts restrictions and we are back to normal.

If you already have an appointment scheduled, you do not need to come into the office. You will receive an email asking you to sign an informed consent form and then your counselor will call you at the number you provided on the day and at the time of your appointment. If this is not satisfactory to you or if you wish to change the phone number, PLEASE EMAIL YOUR COUNSELOR DIRECTLY. All counselors' emails are on the Branches website and attached to this email.

Because Branches has become a symbolic place of safety and peace, until we are ordered to do so, we will not close the doors. Branches will stay open from 9am to 3pm Monday through Thursday. There will be a counselor on the premises to help people who walk in or call with anxiety, depression, or any other troubling mental or emotional issues. In addition, we will increase our offerings of podcasts, videos, and online help to assist you during these challenging days. I encourage you to email your counselor and stay closely connected to Branches in that way.

I have spent a lot of time over the last few days in Psalm 91. David must have googled coronavirus when he wrote this. Look at some of the key phrases, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." "Surely He will save you from the...deadly pestilence." "His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." "You will not fear the terror of night..., nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday." And listen how David ends the Psalm, "I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him My salvation." That is why Branches does what it does. And that is how we are praying for you.

Dr. C. Michael Courtney, Director
Branches Counseling and Wellness Centers