



COVID-19 Corporate Worship Plan Of Action

Overview

Governor Northam announced the beginning of Phase 2 of Virginia's reopening from the COVID-19 pandemic on June 5, 2020. Although this will certainly be welcome news to many, Phase 2 won't come without its risks. At Aletheia Church we want to move forward in faith and wisdom while also honoring our government officials.

Please know that your Pastor and Elders love you and seek to care for you in the best and safest ways possible. We are praying for you, we miss you, and we long to rejoin you in reopening face-to-face services at Aletheia. As we move forward, we want to do so with a clear conscience and a testimony that, as much as is possible, is above reproach. For this reason, our plan for reopening Aletheia is built upon deliberation, counsel, and prayer. This plan is developed with input from

1. The Elder team and their wives
2. Medical professionals who are part of our church family
3. Harrisonburg City Council
4. You (the short survey you filled out)

We have sought not only the insight of various leaders and medical professionals in our City, but also their blessing. It is important that our church's public testimony represents well the challenge Peter gives us in chapter 2.13-15 of his first letter:

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

While we certainly desire to walk in wisdom, we cannot completely eradicate the risks associated with reopening during the current pandemic. And if we're honest, all of life carries with it a certain degree of risk. Because COVID-19 will probably be with us for quite some time, any steps that we take will involve some risk. Please know that we will do everything possible to mitigate those risks.

We also know that as we take steps toward our eventual goal of a “normal” and unrestricted service, many of you won’t be able to join us right away for one reason or another (e.g., for health reasons, or because of uneasiness or anxiety). We love you. You are a valuable part of our church family, and you have not been forgotten. For these reasons our livestream and our current model of shepherding will continue for the foreseeable future.

Throughout the time of our “exile” I have been encouraged by your commitment to and love for each other. Your testimony of brotherly love has permeated our city and its surrounding communities in such a way that those who are not of the faith have praised you. As your pastor I could not be more proud! My heart is so encouraged by the reality that a global pandemic cannot keep the Aletheia Church family from being the church! May God pour his favor upon you through the presence of his Holy Spirit as you continue to walk in faith.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Safety:** Our first concern is your safety. We will take every precaution necessary to keep you and your family safe. Those safety measures are outlined below.
- 2. Unity:** Not everyone will agree or feel comfortable with every aspect of our plan. Some will want to move more quickly while others will want to be more cautious. Nevertheless, we must take action with these procedures in place for the foreseeable future. Now more than ever we each need to hold our expectations with open hands and be patient with others who do not see things the way we see them. Unity is vital as we move forward. Jesus’ desire is that his church would be unified (John 17:20-21).
- 3. Love:** Our decisions are made from a heart of love for you, for our city, and for its surrounding communities. We ask that you follow us as we follow Christ in loving one another with a fervent love, one that serves as a great witness for the gospel to our neighbors.

Everything that we do as followers of Christ must have in view the love and interests of our brothers and sisters as well as our neighbors - the same love we have received from our heavenly father through Christ. The apostle Paul writes, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10.24), and “Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak (or vulnerable),” (1 Corinthians 8.9). We must always seek to “count others more significant than [ourselves] and to “look not only to [our] own interests, but also the interests of others.” (adapted from Philippians 2.3-4).

- 4. Hope:** As we begin to move forward, we will not ignore the reality that our world is different because of this global pandemic. However, we are a people of hope. And setting our hope fully on the grace that will be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13) will be our aim at each step. Ultimately our hope isn’t rooted in the end of COVID-19. It is rooted

instead in the revelation of Christ. This hope is what moves us, what motivates us, what allows us to live in unity and express love.

5. **Our Public Testimony:** As much as possible we want to put forth a winsome or appealing testimony of the gospel to our city and to its surrounding communities. We will do this best by honoring our government officials and by caring for the most vulnerable among us as we begin to reopen.
6. **Protecting and serving the most vulnerable among us:** Working diligently to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among our church family will help to protect the most vulnerable among us, and in our communities.
7. **Making data-driven decisions:** With the help of our medical professionals and Harrisonburg City Council, we will monitor data regularly in order to ensure that we are operating in a safe and healthy way. We believe, based on Psalm 19, that God reveals himself to us in the created order; and that includes knowledge to be learned from the scientific disciplines. While science is an evolving field, we must not underestimate the things God might be saying to us through it.
8. **Cleanliness:** We will work to ensure that everything is as clean as possible before, between, and after each gathering. Special care and attention to detail will be given to the seats in the auditorium.

Next Steps

We plan to begin physically meeting together as a church body at EMHS on **July 12**. These meetings will take place with the restrictions outlined below. In the weeks leading up to July 12, we will be testing ideas and possible scenarios at EMHS with a small group of leaders in order to learn how best to prepare for holding a safe worship gathering.

Safety Measures and General Expectations

1. **Risk of illness:** If you are in a “high risk category” for contracting COVID-19, we release you to stay at home and encourage you to engage our service via our livestream. If you or a member of your family has developed any COVID-19 symptoms, we ask that you remain at home. We understand that some of our members and regular attenders are experiencing chronic health challenges, and we appreciate that COVID-19 may be particularly scary for these individuals. Caring for the health of everyone in the interim, we long for the day when we can all gather in full health and without fear. Until then, we will continue our livestream for anyone who is not present among us.
2. **Registration:** We must limit the number of people in the auditorium at EMHS to the allowable capacity (50% of normal capacity, while maintaining 6 feet of distance between individuals/families). Please therefore plan to register yourself and anyone coming with you each week. We ask that you register for one of two services (9:00am & 11:15am)

and plan to attend that service each week until we can resume our “normal” pre-COVID-19 service.

3. **Aletheia Jr.:** Because of the risk of infection and the difficulty of controlling the spread of germs, we cannot open Aletheia Jr. during the pandemic. While this will present a challenge for families with young children, we encourage you to do what is best for your family as you consider re-entry. You may wish to:
 - a. Continue to worship at home
 - b. Alternate service times with your spouse
 - c. Alternate weeks with your spouse (i.e., one week one spouse goes, the next week home worship, the following week the other spouse goes)
 - d. Come together with your entire family! (Please see #6 below for guidelines and expectations during your time in the building.)

The corporate worship gathering is vitally important to our lives as followers of Jesus, and we need to engage in the absolute best way we can. Our children need to see the spiritual leaders of their home (Mom and Dad) placing a value on corporate worship.

4. **Arriving at the EMHS building:** As you approach the building after parking your vehicle, please keep at least 6 feet of distance between you (your family) and others. From this moment until you return to your vehicle after the service, please keep your children with you at all times.
5. **Entering the building:** A greeter will admit you into the lobby in a staggered entry, and lead you to one side of the auditorium. The greeter will take you to a row of seats.
6. **During your time in the building:**
 - a. In accordance with Governor Northam’s Executive Order 63, a mask covering the mouth and nose is to be worn by everyone age ten and older while in the building. We also encourage, based on CDC recommendations, that children between ages two and nine wear a mask to the extent possible. While individuals are on the stage, they will not be wearing a mask. We understand and appreciate that some in our church are not comfortable wearing a mask during our services. However, as Christians we are called to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21), and to love one another (1 John 4:7). Jesus himself teaches us that people will know that we are Christians by our love for each other (John 13:35). The wearing of a mask during the current pandemic represents a very strong and tangible expression of love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition, wearing a mask while in the building is part of us honoring our governing authorities (Romans 13:1). If you need help securing a mask for you and your family, we can help.
 - b. Once you are at your seat, please try to remain there for the duration of the service (our service time will be 45 minutes). We will be cleaning the areas of the building which we use thoroughly between services, and wish to minimize the burden on our volunteer cleaners. If you must leave the auditorium, an usher will meet you in the lobby to help you.

- c. We expect your children to remain with you at all times while you are in the building, and that your family maintain social distancing procedures. Though fellowship is ordinarily a key part of gathering, we cannot fellowship during this time. Our time together is for public worship - we will gather, publicly worship, and then depart. We will therefore be unable to serve coffee or refreshments under this model.
- 7. Communion:** Because of the risk to health, we have made the difficult decision to suspend communion for now. We will resume communion as soon as it is reasonably safe to do so.
- 8. As you leave the building:** Ushers will release you one row at a time. Please remain in your row until you are released by an usher. Once you have exited the building, please make your way to your vehicle while practicing social distancing measures. While we understand and share the desire to connect with our church family, it is very important that we do not gather in large groups in the parking lot.

Final Thoughts

As we begin to take small steps towards normalization, we must remember to remain patient and to strive for unity, and bear in mind the principles of scripture, including, but not limited to, Philippians 2:3-4. Things might feel a bit awkward at first, things won't feel normal, and there may be adjustments along the way. But please know that we are diligently seeking God for wisdom as we strive to care for you, the Aletheia Church family, in the best way possible.