

COVID-19 UPDATE

May 15, 2020

Dear Church Family,

Please read this update in its entirety as there is a lot of information and thoughts contained within.

As I shared in our previous video update, we need continued patience and flexibility from our members right now. Every church, every business, and every public space is having to make adjustments and there is no litmus test or manual for how to do this. I know some people are completely over the pandemic and ready to just get back to "normal" and do not want to see a "new normal". For others they are not ready to reopen at all and take the precautions during these times very seriously. They welcome a "new normal" and are grateful for efforts to keep them safe. Then there are a number of different stages in between.

We are trying to navigate the tension of two very difficult worlds: doing too much and doing too little. To reopen well it is essential that we do not minimize anyone's feelings, even if their feelings are not our own. We do not want to be critical of decisions (government, church, businesses or otherwise), but try to be humble, understanding, and helpful with suggestions where we can be.

Please know that every decision that has been made thus far by church leadership, and will continue to be made, has been made trying to walk in the tension of everyone's faith-filled responses and feelings. To be clear, neither those who believe *everything should be fully reopened*, nor those who feel like *major precautions need to be in place* are any less faith-filled than the other. Both parties, and everyone in between, are trying to operate from God-given discernment. And that's what we as church leaders are trying to do as well. With that in mind, the following is our game plan thus far.

REOPEN DATE:

Right now, we are shooting for a **very tentative** "soft reopening" in **early June**. Please know that we all want to be able to reopen and gather together again; however, **there are a number of factors that we have to consider that could force us to push back that start date and, at a minimum, will require us to change the way we meet for a little while:**

- Different Government reopen orders
- What regulations are given for reopening (how many people are allowed to meet, what cleaning regulations and distancing regulations are in place, etc.)
- Access to cleaning supplies
- Making sure we can reopen safely
- Legal/Civil recommendations (liability, etc.)
- Can our leaders get all the details in place in time
- Will the facility be able to be ready and compliant by the reopen date?
- Nursery needs, Kids' Ministry needs, etc.
- Plus, a host of other potential factors that we may or may not be fully aware of at present

OUR GAME PLAN RIGHT NOW:

This is still very much up in the air. I have asked the leaders to bring the Safety and Security Team (CARE Team) and the Connect Team into this conversation, as well, to help us evaluate all the information given by state and health professionals and help us make decisions and recommendations for our next steps. Depending on state-issued capacity restrictions, recommended numbers, distancing requirements, and regulations we may have to have more than one worship service and possibly change up the way we do small groups for a little while. Once our teams meet together, I will release our game plan for reopening Bethany.

REOPENING OF THE BUILDINGS

The building will remain closed for all non-essential, non-operational events and activities until we are able to reopen as a church.

SUMMER PLANS

Broyhill Mission Trip has been cancelled by their Leadership. Due to the virus, they have suspended all groups visiting campus.

Our Vacation Bible School has been adjusted. We are waiting to see what the regulations and recommendations will be for the summer, but we will not be able to have our traditional VBS as we hoped. However, Pastor Jason has come up with a fun VBS-alternative that we will share more about later, once we know more.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

1. Pray for your government leaders
2. Pray for your church leaders
3. Pray for our members, tensions, understanding and flexibility
4. Don't add to the confusion. How we represent Him in at home, online, at church, in meetings, and with our private conversations matters.
5. Please exercise patience with church leaders as this is a very difficult season with a number of layers to navigate beyond one or two families or age brackets. **If we do too little, we could be held liable for jeopardizing safety. If we do too much, we could over complicate an already difficult season. And regardless of what is done, some will always feel that it was way too much or way too little. So, you can help by walking with us in patience and understanding.**
6. Continue to gather remotely! Stream sermons, share sermons online, text sermons to friends, gather in small groups on zoom, etc. These digital platforms and meetings are far more important than you may realize.

HOW LONG WILL THIS LAST:

Like you, we do not know, and no leader does. However, we celebrate the steps being taken to reopen and will continue to take healthy steps that allow us to regather as we are able to do so safely. **While a number of the changes we will face in the short-term are meant to be temporary, let's not lose sight of how God might be using this to open our eyes to new ideas and possibilities, too.** God brings life and goodness from death and brokenness. What new ministry opportunities and ideas might be birthed from this unplanned and difficult season? Let us pray for God to open our hearts and eyes to the unexpected!

Remember - We are (still) Bethany! **Galatians 6:9-10 - "Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith."**