

COVID-19 CHURCH UPDATE

Re: New Church Year (2020-2021)

Hello Church Family,

I cannot begin to thank you all for your patience, support, flexibility and perseverance in what has proven to be a very long and tiring COVID season for all of us. However, I want to remind you all as I did at the beginning of all of this, God is the same “yesterday, today and forever” and there is nowhere we have been or will end up that God has not already been.

Even though this is not the climate I had hoped to begin our church year in, I am still very excited to see what God has in store for Bethany in this new church year. I am excited to see how:

- God will use this difficult climate to shape us as individuals and our church for His glory
- God will use our church in the lives of those in our community looking for hope, direction and answers
- We will grow in Gospel perseverance (James 1:2-4)

I have met with the COVID Response Team, deacons and staff regarding the upcoming church year and wanted to share the decisions we have made regarding our next steps as a church. Please read all of this letter as there is important information regarding:

1. Kids and Teens
 - o AWANA
 - o Kids Church
 - o Teen Ministry (Refuge)
 2. Worship Services
 3. Small Groups
 4. Homecoming
-

1. BETHANY KIDS MINISTRY

AWANA

After much deliberation, numerous conversations and prayer, we have made the difficult decision to cancel AWANA for the 2020-2021 church year. In addition to health and safety there were a number of reasons for this decision, but the three most pressing were:

- **Shortage of workers.** Pastor Jason reached out to our AWANA leaders via church email asking who planned to return and had very little response back. Those who did respond, the majority said they did not plan to serve in AWANA this year due to health or safety concerns.
- **Schedule.** AWANA operates on a year-long schedule and does not have much room for alterations. Due to the book, verse and reward system, AWANA needs to run the full year to be successful and so delaying the start 1-4 months is not really a viable option.
- **Resources.** AWANA requires a number of resources to operate successfully – in particular, a large number of adult volunteers. While Jason and I both love the AWANA ministry, after meeting with different leaders we felt this season might be a good opportunity to redeem the setback and try something different.

Even though AWANA will not be able to meet, Pastor Jason is working with some Kids' Ministry leaders to create a new Sunday evening ministry called **Bethany Kids Zone** and the hope is to launch that

ministry in early 2021 on Sunday evenings. Until then, he will use the next couple months to develop that ministry, train leaders and cultivate safety protocols needed to make the ministry a success. NOTE: Starting this Kids Zone ministry does not mean Bethany is finished with AWANA; however, we want to use this season to pray and evaluate – which will include listening to our workers, parents, and kids. We will keep you posted as we go.

BETHANY KIDS CHURCH

We are re-opening Bethany Kids Church! There will be some big changes to the ministry, but Bethany Kids Church (BKC) **will begin meeting on Sunday, September 13.**

New Format, Changes and Info:

- Meeting Time: BKC will only meet during the **second service**
- New Age Range: BKC will now only be open to kids ages 4 thru 2nd grade (grades 3-5 will remain with their parents in the service)
 - o Kids must be 4 years old to enter Kids Church
- Location: Kids Church will still meet in the Conference Center
- Safety Protocols: Kids are welcome to wear masks but will not be mandated (as recommended by the CDC). We are working now to develop new safety measures to keep kids as safe as possible while still allowing them to have fun, play, worship and be Kids.

BETHANY TEEN MINISTRY (Refuge Student Ministries)

We are re-opening Refuge **beginning Sunday, September 13** with some changes:

- Masks are recommended but not required
- Same Age Groups: Grades 6-12
- Meeting Time: Sundays from 5-7pm
- Meeting Location: Refuge will meet in the Family Life Center to allow for better distancing

2. WORSHIP SERVICES

We are currently evaluating when it would be wise/possible for us to move back to one service as a church. Unfortunately, with the safety measures and protocols we need to have in place (distancing, reducing traffic in the halls, sanitizing, etc.), that move is not as simple as it may seem. Having one service with protocols means we would have to make the use of overflow rooms mandatory once the Worship Center reaches capacity. Our attendance records already show us that we would meet capacity weekly (and that is with summer numbers – not including those coming back regularly from vacation and those coming back post-quarantine). So there is a lot for us to consider:

- Do we have adequate space for overflow in rooms where streaming is available?
- Willingness of members to worship in overflow should we meet capacity and they be asked to worship in those spaces
- Consideration for visitors being asked to go to overflow if we max out a service with attendance
- Sound capability to broadcast the service with quality so those worshipping in those spaces can worship well (when more people are in overflow spaces, it changes the sound needs)
- Ability to distance in those spaces and clean those spaces well

Rest assured that our desire is to worship together again, and we are meeting regularly to evaluate these conversations. We will keep you posted as we learn more.

3. SMALL GROUPS

As it currently stands, only the Small Groups who were having trouble meeting virtually (due to lack of tech) have been able to meet at different times on Sunday mornings around the Worship Services. Other groups were encouraged to continue meeting virtually, or to meet in person in the FLC or Conference Center on different days of the week, or at an off-campus location such as a park or home (where there was adequate space for distancing). While our hope is to have more on-campus groups meeting on Sundays, right now we need to remain as we are. Once we see how the reopening of Kids' Church and Refuge goes and make decisions regarding the Worship Services, we will be able to better gauge our next steps for Small Groups.

In the meantime, we highly encourage adult groups not to forsake meeting but to be creative with how they meet. Building community in these groups is crucial for connection, worship and spiritual growth. Work in your groups to determine some ways you might meet together outside of Sundays.

4. HOMECOMING (October 4)

Homecoming 2020 will look different than years' past. We are still in discussions with what Homecoming will look like this year, but we will celebrate together still – even if differently. Here are the things we already know:

- The bad news: Due to CDC recommendations and considerations we will not be able to serve food or have our annual meal this year
- We will still celebrate our Homecoming in both services (details TBA)
- Our Homecoming Offering will go toward the following projects (after the weekly budget):
 - o New Sound System (still in need of \$15,000-17,000; we currently have approx. \$6,000)
 - o \$4,250 to rekey church and install new electronic entry (CARE Team)
 - o Remaining Money – Toward Phase 2 of our Connect Campaign (Parking)

Other plans are still being finalized and we will have more information as we get closer.

That is all for now, Church Family. Please continue to pray for the leaders of our church as we navigate this season the best we can. This has not been an easy season but we are grateful to be walking through it with you all and are appreciative beyond words for your patience, understanding, support and continued ministry to others.

Laboring Together,
Pastor Christian