

May 12, 2020

Dear Church family,

As I hope you have heard by now, we are planning to begin a phased re-gathering of our church for worship this Sunday, May 17. This letter will provide a few more details as you and your family make your own plans.

First, a little background on our decision. As we pastors have wrestled with the right date to re-open over the past month, we have tried to keep three big priorities in view. First, we want to obey the Bible's command to gather in Jesus' name for public worship on Sunday! (Heb 10:24–25, etc.) Second, we take seriously the health and safety of the people we love so much. In God's providence, emergencies sometimes arise (i.e., ice storms, floods, viruses) that hinder us from responsibly asking you to come meet on campus. Third, we want to honor God by complying with what our civil authorities ask of us as much as possible (see Rom 13:1–7).

After much prayer and discussion, consulting with local doctors and other area ministers, we believe that we can fulfill all three of these priorities with a phased re-entry of gathered worship on May 17. Our facilities allow us to maintain social-distancing standards better than most churches, and we will continue to live-stream our services for those who cannot yet safely gather with us. We are limiting our in-person gatherings to 10:15 worship only at this time, and implementing several modifications to our regular routine in an effort to gather as safely as we can (see below). Under these conditions, we are excited to call the body of Sharon Baptist church back together for worship on Sunday!

Here are a few details about what you can expect this Sunday:

- Senior adults, individuals with a compromised immune system or underlying health condition, families with infants, or those responsible for the care of the vulnerable are encouraged to continue worshipping from home via live-stream.
- Anyone who has been knowingly exposed to the COVID-19 virus, has a fever, or feels sick should remain home. We ask you to monitor yourselves; we will not take temperatures or ask health questions as you enter.
- Anyone who wishes to wear a mask throughout the service is encouraged to do so, though we will not distribute or require masks to be worn.
- We will provide hand sanitizer, but also encourage you to bring your own.
- We will implement several modifications to promote social distancing
  - We will limit our in-person gatherings to 10:15 worship only. There will be no childcare, Sunday school, Wednesday night studies, etc., at this time.

- We have created space between seats by removing every-other row of chairs in the sanctuary. Our seating capacity is 999, so we will be well within that recommended 50% capacity. Our chairs can be conveniently separated and moved, so individuals and families will be able to sit with as much distance from others as they desire. Deacons will be available to assist families in moving chairs or getting more chairs.
- We will eliminate as many “physical touch” elements as possible: doors will be propped open, no greeting team (a small team of deacons will provide security), we will not print bulletins, do a greeting time, or pass offering baskets (we’ll have a collection box in the foyer), etc.
- We encourage members not to shake hands, hug, etc., but won’t attempt to “police” this. Please consider others and how best to love them.
- No childcare will be provided; families will remain together at all times during the service. It’s OK if it’s noisy. Parents are free to take children to the foyer during the service, where monitors will broadcast the service.
- Restrooms in the foyer will be available.
- David Caldwell will be spot-cleaning in the foyer during the service, and will thoroughly clean the building before our next meeting.

We’ll never eliminate all risks, but we think that we can gather responsibly under these simple guidelines. As we seek to honor the Lord during these unusual days, let’s strive to be extra gracious and considerate of one another. Some may choose for the time being to keep worshipping from home. Some may choose to gather, and be relatively unconcerned about the virus. Some may choose to gather, and be very concerned and cautious, for any number of good reasons. We can glorify God by loving, serving, and encouraging each other across this spectrum of approaches. What an excellent opportunity to live out our church’s theme verse: “Therefore welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom 15:7)

How long will this phase last? Honestly, we don’t know! We will re-evaluate the situation at the end of May and keep you informed from there. The Lord has been teaching us all to hold our plans humbly and loosely (I highly recommend soaking in the wise counsel of James 4:13–17)! While your pastors are eager to see our church firing on all cylinders, we continue to be amazed at how we see the Lord working in and through you during quarantine—and we can see only a fraction of his wise and good plan. For now, I’m overjoyed to gather under the gospel with you on Sunday!

Much love in Jesus,

Pastor Eric