

What has changed? Why are the elders and staff moving to re-engage using the campus buildings to hold worship services?

After extensive prayer and listening to each other and the people in our body, we are announcing that indoor services will begin on Sunday, September 20, 2020. We continue to seek to be consistent in our biblical/moral decision-making, as you will hopefully see from the chart below. We continue to hold the same values. But some things have changed from THEN to NOW. The major changes are indicated by the red type in the NOW column. We believe these changes warrant our mutual decision to engage services indoors.

We believe we can practice a humble yet thoughtful appropriate submission to our best understanding of the governor's intent of keeping people safe, while still fulfilling our mission. Therefore, we have decided to follow these self-imposed restrictions during indoor gatherings at this time.

- Encourage social distancing through communication, teaching, and the way the large room is set up.
- Encourage, recommend, and model the use of masks in circumstances where social distancing is virtually impossible to maintain, especially including in the interaction spaces of the hallways and restrooms.
 - Encourage the use of more effective masks through teaching.
 - Communicate that the use of masks will allow us to be less stringent on social distancing, thus allowing for more meaningful conversations and fellowship.
 - Have masks available and signage that explains our practices.
 - Masks would be recommended but not be required during the services as people are seated with their family/household groups.
- Other adjustments include:
 - Eliminate refreshments.
 - Continue increased cleaning of facilities.
 - Have sermon notes and announcements for pick up from a table.

VALUE	THEN	NOW
Always honor God and fulfill our God-given mission	ABSOLUTE "YES." THEN we considered that "the assembling of ourselves together" could take non-traditional forms for a period. We said that video services were not a long-term strategy for growing a healthy church.	ABSOLUTE "YES." NOW we are noticing that for some the prolonged absence of gathering is hindering the fulfillment of our mission in their lives.
Seek to consistently practice and model living "Under the Word"	ABSOLUTE "YES." THEN the extensive paper and videos were attempts to help us learn how to make decisions taking seriously the teaching of the Word (over political, scientific, sociological, and/or emotional reasoning). We wanted our people to think biblically about when to submit and when NOT to submit to authorities God has placed over us.	ABSOLUTE "YES." NOW we still want to be consistent in our handling of the Word of God. This paper is an attempt to explain "what has changed," even as we affirm what has not changed.

VALUE	THEN	NOW
<p>Out of love, show practical concern for the physical welfare of our attenders and the broader community</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>THEN, as always, we concerned ourselves with the safety of those who attend our services, youth ministry, and small groups. We have had consistent background checks and procedures called Ministry Safe. We have an Emergency Response Team that looks out for our security. We chose not to meet in person to help "flatten the curve" and "limit the spread" of Covid-19.</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>NOW we are realizing that our concern for the spiritual and emotional welfare of the people God has entrusted to us must be weighed against making physical safety the key concern. Even as our governor has modified certain restrictions realizing the importance of gathering for school or opening the economy, we must be open to modifying our application of the restrictions.</p>
<p>Obey the specific teaching passages that speak of submission to governing authorities</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>THEN we submitted to the specific commands given in the Bible, including 1 Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1-2, and Romans 13:1-7. The values/arguments we use to decide must not violate the clear teaching of the Word.</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>NOW we still are under what the Bible teaches about civil obedience, while remembering what it models about exercising civil disobedience. Some have questioned if our governor is exercising legitimate authority in her executive orders. If we believe she has over-stepped, we must use the courts to seek recourse. Only after such peaceful means have been exhausted, should we consider civil disobedience.</p>
<p>"Do unto others, what we want done to us" by listening with the judgment of charity for the speaker/author's intent.</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>THEN the early executive orders made blanket statements that <i>everyone</i> was to stay home. It was understood that included staying home from church services. That is what almost everyone did for the first number of weeks.</p> <p>Some interpreted the exemption from prosecution statement to mean that churches could/should do whatever they wanted to. We rather understood that the exemption was an expression of the governor's understanding of the separation of church and state. We understood her intent to be that <i>everyone</i> was under the order, but she could/should not enforce it for churches.</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>NOW we are still trying to understand the governor's intent, while fighting for a judgment of charity toward her motives. What has changed is her exemptions and exceptions, which over time have made it more difficult to discern her intent. She has given no further specific guidance to churches while reaffirming that she will not charge them with a misdemeanor.</p> <p>At the same time, she has opened many businesses to 25% or 50% capacity. She has allowed the indoor gathering limit of 10 to be superseded for classrooms, recreational facilities and even gatherings for school sporting events.</p> <p>The confusing reply from the regional health officer stated that he interpreted that churches are to obey the orders, but if they choose not to, they should consider a number of recommendations (not directives). This is as confusing as telling a teenager they should remain sexually chaste, but then giving them contraceptives for when they do not obey.</p> <p>This level of confusion continues to mount. We understood her intent was a short-term restriction on our freedoms. It seems likely that the restrictions will be in place until Spring. The time frame of the restrictions is a major change.</p>
<p>Be Gospel-fluent remembering our choices are seen by unbelievers around us. We must communicate in a way that expresses our love for all.</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>THEN we valued the way unbelievers viewed our choices, seeking to "keep our conduct among the Gentiles honorable" (1 Pe 2:12).</p>	<p>ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>NOW we have seen how some groups who have blatantly violated the orders have been labeled as selfish and self-absorbed, not caring for others. While we cannot bow to public opinion, we continue to want to communicate that we care about the whole person, body and soul. We choose to be sensitive to those most vulnerable and fearful, for their sakes and the sake of those "looking on."</p>

VALUE	THEN	NOW
<p>Speak the truth in love amid disagreements.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>THEN we encouraged seeking the judgment of charity for others, not assuming the worst about their motives. We encouraged speaking in measured tones that would not enflame the rhetoric to the point where we even question the faith of other believers who are earnestly seeking God's wisdom in these issues.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSOLUTE "YES."</p> <p>NOW some in our society have made <i>ad hominem</i> attacks the norm. These affronts to the other person's character do not address the policies or values behind their decisions. We do not want others to write us off, to "cancel" us, so we must not do that to them.</p>