



Reopening Strategy

May 29th, 2020

The Coronavirus pandemic has created new challenges for all churches, including First Baptist. I applaud you for your adaptability and your uninterrupted faithfulness. You have moved out of your comfort zone and embraced innovation quickly, willingly, and joyfully. As we look toward the future together, let's learn from our successes and continue to adapt to meet the ever-changing needs and challenges we face.

Without your devotion, none of our past or future successes would be possible. So let's join together in the Spirit of Christ as we prepare for and implement the necessary measures to be able to return to the building. Our goals are: Keeping you and your family safe while expressing our love for God, showing our love to our neighbors, and making disciples in our community and around the world.

While we have the lawful ability to hold services now, we have other context to consider, such as the size of our congregation, the vulnerable populations we serve each week, and the logistical steps necessary to keep our public areas clean and attendees healthy and safe. So, we have outlined a few items we believe are important considerations that will impact the decision of how and when we will resume meeting together in person:

Current Status:

- We will rely on the guidance provided by local government and public health officials to inform when and how large, indoor gatherings can be conducted safely.
- While in Phase 1 (beginning on May 29th for NOVA) and Phase 2 we will continue to hold services online only. Though we are aware we have the right to open in Phase 1 & 2, the suggestions for crowds of our size to meet safely do not allow us the flexibility needed to do so.

For Example:

- Meeting in groups of 10, or even 50 or less while maintaining social distancing is not feasible for a church our size without excluding many members from being able to attend.

- Currently, due to widespread shortages, we are unable to obtain the cleaning products necessary to fully execute the recommended cleaning regimens that will help us protect our most at-risk members.
- For these reasons, we have determined that Virginia's Phase 3 guidelines (when limits on the size of gatherings are fully waived) offer us the best opportunity to reopen our building for Sunday worship while both complying with recommended state crowd size guidelines and ensuring the widest range of mitigation efforts to protect our congregation.

Reopening Plan:

When the time does come to reopen, we envision a cautious approach. Some public health guidelines may work well from the outset, and others may need to be adjusted as we learn what is best for our FBCA community - especially those at the highest risk from the virus.

Below are some basic guidelines for re-opening that we are considering, given what we know at this moment:

1. Once we enter Phase 3, in-person Sunday services will resume. Online services will continue to be offered for those who prefer to continue to worship at home.
2. In-person gatherings would, at least initially, observe social distancing protocols.
3. Due to social distancing a limited number of attendees will be able to attend each service. To compensate, we are looking at adding alternate options such as an additional service, as well as continuing to offer online services.
4. Initially, we will not conduct Bible Fellowship/Sunday School classes, nursery or preschool provisions in the church building.
5. Masks will likely be required to attend in-person services for ages 3 and up.
6. In order to reduce the risk of virus transmission via high touch surfaces we will not distribute bulletins, hymnals, Bibles, or pass the offering plate. Electronic alternatives will be available.

Until such a time as the virus can be brought under control we are doing what we can to adapt to the current circumstances and to find ways to be together. This initial approach is intended to be flexible, as the situation is likely to continue to change at a rapid pace. We will communicate any changes to our approach as best we can as decisions are made.

The health and safety of our church family is critical, but our connection to each other is also vitally important. Our intention is to implement measures that advance both priorities in a balanced, reasonable way. By remaining hopeful, giving grace and compassion to one another, and exercising the wisdom and reason that God provides us, we can love others well and continue to influence our neighbors with the Gospel.

