

July 6, 2020

Siblings in Christ,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much about the way we live, socialize, work, grocery shop, and even worship. There has been much loss in this process and there is much to be grieved.

I'm grateful for our online presence. Our need to adapt has given us the nudge we need to share the gospel outside of our walls. I hope that, when this pandemic no longer poses such an immediate threat, we will continue to be a church that utilizes the internet to transform lives in Jesus' name. I'm thrilled about our weekly turnout for online YouTube worship, and even those who watch the clips later. You have been so faithful through this process. You make me proud to be your pastor.

As we resume some of our regular activities, they are still different. We still need to take many precautions and, for many of us, we go through these activities with a sense of anxiety, dread, and grief. I'm getting used to the mask. I'm getting used to the grocery store. I miss many of my friends and family. I miss all of you. I miss being together and singing with you all. I miss shaking hands and hugging at the time of peace. I miss pressing a piece of bread into your hand and saying, "The body of Christ, given for you."

As you probably know by now, we have assembled a team that is keeping tabs on the pandemic, how our area is responding to it, and assessing the risks of activities that take place in our church. This team, which consists of three medical professionals and four other congregational leaders, has every intention of managing the spiritual vitality of our congregation with our need to be a good neighbor and be safe. We are currently piloting an "outdoor gathering" program that we hope to roll out some time by the end of July or early August.

Again, thank you for your patience and your faithfulness. If you need anything, please know that I am here for you, as is our congregation's leadership. We continue to work hard towards our mission: To know Christ and to make Christ known. If you are looking to get more involved in any aspect of our congregation, please reach out to me or Rob Mannix, our Director of Discipleship.

I look forward to the time when we can all be together again. For now, we will make the best of this situation and be the church, united as one, wherever we are.

Faithfully,

*Pastor Tim*



## **COVID 19 UPDATE – May 24, 2020 – Statement by Pastor Tim**

When our congregation council met this past Monday, we discussed the steps we would take to gradually resume church activities in a safe way that allows us handle the delicate balance between being together in community, and loving our neighbor by keeping everyone safe in the midst of this unprecedented global pandemic. In fact, we understood on Monday that this would be a sensitive subject that would evoke a gut-based emotional response from people, as do most matters of politics these days. I was advised to not use the words “opening” or “reopening” because they are triggering words for people on both extremes of the political spectrum.

But over this weekend, there has been a lot of talk about reopening churches. President Trump has called on all governors to regard houses of worship as “essential” and allow them to re-open and resume all activities, including in-person worship.

I agree with our president, that houses of worship, of all religions, are essential and the first amendment covering our right to worship is one of this country’s greatest assets. And yet, I take issue with all of the talk about “reopening” that has taken place in our public discourse. Friends, the church has always been open. We have restricted many activities and moved worship to the internet for the good of public health, but our operations continue. We continue to worship God, study scripture, educate children, care for one another, care for those in our community, and feed those who need it. We continue to know Christ and make Christ known. The church can only truly close when we stop loving our neighbor in the name of Jesus.

Part of loving our neighbor is honoring the process of remediating the COVID-19 pandemic. To consider ourselves above that process... To consider our need to be together more important than the need to save lives, would be reckless and selfish, and one of the least Christian things we could do, especially here in Delaware County, where we are not effectively combating this virus.

In the next week or so, we will put out a survey--to check in with you, see how you’re doing, how we can serve you, and your views on this pandemic. We will be assembling a taskforce of church leaders and medical professionals from our congregation which will develop a tier based system that will allow us to gradually resume church activities without posing a public health risk. We expect this to be a drawn out, gradual process, and it will even be inconvenient and frustrating at times. Please remember, God’s people have traveled gradually through the wilderness to the promised land before. God fed them along their journey, and we know that God will give us what we need in our journey. We thank you in advance for your patience, your grace and your continued emotional and financial support.

I urge you, as your pastor, as the father of a newborn baby, to not be swept up in the political rhetoric of this time, and whenever possible, to love your neighbor through the act of physical distancing. Let us be kind to one another, offering the grace and forgiveness that Christ first gave us. Imagine that everyone is going through a difficult time, because in the many conversations I’ve had with you all, this is generally true. I long to be with you all again, but not if it will put any of you, your loved ones, or our essential workers at risk. We will continue in our mission, we will love our neighbor, we will remain essential and open, and we will worship, this morning and into eternity. Amen.