

May 5, 2020

Greetings Cornerstone Family,

This past Sunday the elders and deacons of Cornerstone gathered after worship to discuss plans for re-opening our building for corporate worship. Let me say as the pastor, that I am immensely grateful for the wisdom that these men display, and for the spirit of unity that has always characterized our meetings. We are particularly grateful at a time like this to have men who are trained in the medical field and in law enforcement who can bring the expertise of those fields to bear on situations like the one we now face as a church body.

There is an enormous amount of data to consider and plans to be made before we can open our church in a way that is safe and responsible for all concerned. For this reason we will NOT be resuming corporate worship immediately. Before I lay out our plans for re-opening, let me briefly mention just some of the things that currently influence our decision-making.

- This pandemic is not over, and it will not be over any time soon. Therefore, **we cannot eliminate all risks**. As communities re-open, the number of infections *will* rise. None of the medical authorities dispute this. Rural areas are not projected to peak for several weeks yet. Restrictions are being eased *not* because the virus has run its course, but because of the economic devastation it has brought. Hospital capacities, not numbers of infected, will be the new metric used to gauge public safety.
- All of this means that everyone will have to make his or her own decision about returning to our worship services. As we move toward re-opening, **we are not recommending that all members resume attending**. If you are in a high-risk group, over 65 years of age, or have any of the following risk factors: diabetes, hypertension, cardiac issues, asthma, immunosuppressed, obesity, or other similar risk factors **we are recommending that you stay home and continue to worship with us online for the time being**.
- As our communities re-open this week, expectations are that infections are going to increase drastically. Given the incubation time of Covid19, it will take at least two weeks before we will begin to know how re-opening our economy is going to affect case numbers. So, some measure of caution is still very much in order.
- Even under normal circumstances, the greatest risk for germ spread and infection is in our nursery. Therefore, even when the church re-opens, **we plan not to have a nursery for the foreseeable future**. We *will* have some accommodations for parents with young children, including a room available for you to use if you need to take a child out of the service for a while. Even with this available however, **our recommendation is that families with young children continue to worship with us online for the time being**. If schools are not re-opening yet, this would make the church the place of highest risk for our children.

We want to be very clear that church leadership does not want anyone to feel pressured to return to public worship. Although live-streaming can never fully replace the gathering of the local church, we believe that it can nevertheless fulfill God's command to gather together. We would be heartbroken if any of our most vulnerable members returned to church only to contract the Coronavirus and have their lives endangered by it.

With all of the above guiding our decision (as well as many other logistical issues to consider), **our plan at this time is to re-open the church on June 7th**. This date will allow us to gauge how the re-opening of our economy impacts community spreading, and make the necessary preparations for the safest re-opening possible. When we do re-open, we will ask for your full cooperation in staying away if you are sick and respecting whatever modifications that are necessary for seating, greeting, etc. **We are also recommending that our Life Together groups and our Youth Group continue meeting virtually for the time being**. Rest assured we will continue to monitor the situation and will update everyone accordingly.

The coming days will provide us with a lot more information, but in the meantime we hope you will continue to take this threat seriously. Consider that Pasco County is still under 300 known cases, and has a population of 525,000. This means that, as far as we know, *everyone* in Pasco County is still susceptible to the virus. For many of us who are not in high-risk categories, the danger is not primarily to us, but to those to whom we might spread the disease. We encourage you to stay diligent.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any needs. We are still here to serve you!

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Brian and the elders and deacons of Cornerstone