

May 22, 2020

**Corporate Day of Fasting – May 29th
Tentative Sunday Gathering - June 21st**

Dear Riverside Family,

Thank you for your grace and patience as we try to navigate this unprecedented season together. Many in our body are currently in need of physical healing (not related to covid-19, but with increased isolation because of it). We are asking those who are able to join us in a church-wide day of fasting on Friday, May 29th, 2020. We will plan to fast until our time of prayer (through Zoom) at 7pm. Let us take that day to pray for those in our body who are facing illness and physical pain. Join us as we cry out to God on their behalf.

We are all looking forward to the day that we can worship together and celebrate communion again as a family. As we begin meeting in home groups and then in person again, please know that we humbly accept that we do not have all the answers. We are approaching this pandemic week-by-week because there are many things that we plainly do not know. The challenges we are all facing are unique, and we ask that you continue to pray for wisdom for our church leaders as well as our government leaders.

Riverside has always cared about helping the vulnerable whether they are vulnerable spiritually, economically, or physically. During this season, we have many in our body who are vulnerable to this virus and the potential for them to become ill could have significant gravity. We have consulted with Riversiders who are researchers and medical professionals to help create our own plan to reopen at a rate that is consistent with the recommendations from governing officials and the professionals in our church body.

We are *tentatively* planning on having our first Sunday Gathering on June 21st, provided we have ample supplies, volunteers, and no significant increases of infection in our area. We will not have children's ministry or the nursery open on June 21st, but families are welcome to attend service together.

The professionals in our community recommended that we have hand sanitizer and face coverings available for services because of the asymptomatic spread of this virus. Because of delayed shipping, we are still waiting for these supplies to arrive. At first, we will be asking everyone (who is medically able) to wear a face covering during our Sunday Gatherings, including children who are old enough to safely wear one. For those who are not able to wear a face covering, we will also have socially distant seating available (per our local health department's current order to maintain 6 feet of separation in an enclosed space until July 4th). For those who will be unable to attend in the near future because of health conditions or other concerns, we will still provide a virtual gathering with the same songs and the same teaching from God's word.

We understand that there are differing views on the effectiveness and safety of face coverings. While we all pray that this is a very temporary situation, the virus is still spreading in our local community, so we feel it is appropriate to follow our local health department's order on this issue when we meet. In our church body, we have wonderful people who believe that face coverings are important, and we have wonderful people who do not think they are necessary or effective. We are not asking for people to agree with each other, the government, or our church's current plan for gathering. We are asking for everyone to embody patience, prudence, courage, and unity during this season.

Those who are at more risk of infection from the virus do appreciate the precautions others are taking on their behalf—such as wearing face coverings, using hand sanitizer, and practicing social distancing. Let's all be prepared to extend grace and love to each other during this season.

We have long said that home groups are the foundation of Riverside, and so we started our reopening phase with home groups. We had several groups meet in person last week, but also had some groups that still chose to meet over video conferencing. We appreciate the valuable feedback our people are giving as we consider Sunday morning gatherings in the near future. We also encourage people in our body to start meeting with others (in person or virtually) for bible study, virtual church, support, and prayer.

At the end of the day, let's all remain committed to Jesus, His mission, and to each other. We do not have a perfect plan or perfect answers to this pandemic, but we trust the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to get us through this challenging season. Please continue to pray for wisdom for the leaders of Riverside as well as our governing officials. May the grace, peace, and love of Christ unite us and give us a trustworthy anchor to weather this storm together.

In Christ,

The Elder Team