

# Riverside's Phased "Opening"

Dear Riverside Church Family,

I am sure many of you are wondering, with the Governor's 5-stage "open Indiana" announcement on Friday, what would be happening with our gatherings at Riverside. We have surely missed being able to be face to face on Sundays worshipping together, and breaking bread together during Home Groups. Reading the Governor's words brought encouragement as well as good counsel. His paced approach to opening the state up has given us a pattern for opening up our church body wisely.

As Elders we have prayed and discussed what would be the best course of action for Riverside in the coming weeks and we have developed our own multi-phase opening plan as well. Our concern is that we:

- (1) obey the Governor's guidelines as well as the additional input from our local health department and
- (2) provide for all those in our body with special care for our more vulnerable members.

With that in mind, we are planning on the following time frame, knowing that the dates may need to be adjusted as we see what is happening both state-wide and locally related to the spread of the virus.

Here is our plan for reopening:

**Riverside's Phase 1:** *Beginning next week we will begin work to reopen in-person Home Group meetings as individual leaders feel appropriate in discussion with their group members. We will provide large spaces at The Beacon to allow for social distancing guidelines, make masks available to those who need them so that we can all be "masked," and remind all of us that a large part of loving each other and our neighbours right now is by observing the guidelines recommended such as masks and distance (and likely skipping shared meals). The masks, while uncomfortable and awkward at times, are a way that we can protect those around us from exposure to potential germs we ourselves may be carrying unaware. We want to err on the side of love in all that we are doing throughout this process. Some groups will be quicker than others in terms of meeting in person, some will choose not to meet in-person at all during this phase, and we will learn together how to best do this as we go along.*

*This also means that right now we will continue to worship virtually on Sunday mornings and we will continue to meet three times weekly for prayer via zoom.*

**Phase 2:** The Governor has said that on *June 14th public gatherings of up to 250 people* will be allowable. Assuming that that date remains the same, we will plan to begin gathering on Sunday morning sometime after that date. We recognize that even then many may not feel comfortable gathering together so we will continue to make video songs and teaching available each week so that those staying at home and those gathering in person at The Beacon will experience the same music and teaching content.

We will also not have a children's program or nursery during this phase (hopefully by providing ongoing video content we will continue to support families to continue worshipping at home if they so choose).

We will observe *social distancing guidelines* when gathered, as well as the use of *face masks and hand sanitizer* - again so that we can be *good lovers of each other* during this time.

**Phase 3:** *At a date not yet determined*, we will begin hosting children in the children's program. We realize that many of our young ones and even our teens will have a very hard time with the distancing guidelines and the use of facemasks. It seems best to allow families to navigate this and remain together during the service until we are all operating comfortably with the guidelines and are able to, safely and with comfort for the kids, reopen the children's program.

This may seem like a lot of words, and a lot of waiting. We understand the hard emotions that accompany phases and stages when we all just want to be enjoying each other's company like we were at the beginning of March. It has been long and will continue longer.

But it has been so encouraging watching our body grow and thrive despite the distancing and the pain that separation has brought. It has been a delight to see needs met and people continue to be loved well.

It has made our elder's hearts rejoice to see us as a body love so well in such a tremendously challenging time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to Keith or Benji or any of the Elders. Our greatest concern is the care and shepherding of this body, so your thoughts and concerns are valuable to us.

We love you!

The Elders of Riverside