

Charting a Pathway to Regathering Calvary Bible Fellowship Church

Introduction

In considering a pathway to regathering we sought to determine the difference between “could we regather” and “should we regather.” What unique value would regathering provide at this time. We determined that there are several unique characteristics that regathering would provide. First, regathering would provide restored humanity. We are aware that there are many that are suffering by the forced isolation this pandemic has wrought. This goes beyond the stereotypical shut-in, but extends to every demographic. For many the community of Calvary Bible Fellowship Church is the lynchpin of their lives. Abruptly losing those connections has brought emotional trauma. Our regathering should then seek to heal those wounds. Second, regathering gives opportunity for public praying and scripture reading. The hearing of the Word and the speaking of prayers is a unique element of our gathering that is not truly fulfilled by other means.

It is with these two unique characteristics that we have developed a phased regathering plan. These phases are connected to government guidelines, and other “best practices” we observe in similar organizations and businesses.

And for those who are sick or who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 we strenuously request you not attend any gathering.

This is an initial proposal. This pandemic has caused governments, businesses, and churches to continue to evaluate their practices. Therefore, this is a very dynamic document with guidelines and plans that will be continually revised and adjusted.

Because it is important to keep track of the changing scientific and government guidelines about COVID 19, the elders will appoint a small committee to continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and bring suggested modifications to the elders.

Phase One (Immediately)

- We encourage Connect Groups to begin regathering in homes or outside in backyards or parks (those that wish to continue meeting via Zoom are encouraged to continue). This would include the usual Connect Group meetings but could also include (and we encourage) meeting together to watch the live streaming of Sunday morning worship.

For those who wish to meet in person, there are several cautions we advise to if these gatherings are held indoors. First, that social distancing be observed. Not all homes may be suitable to observe the social distancing guidelines. Second, that the length of these meetings be abbreviated to mitigate the potential concentration of particles in the air. Third, that those who are at high risk not attend. Fourth, the wearing of masks (though encouraged) is at the discretion of the host.

- The church building will be available for smaller gatherings. This would include accommodating Connect Groups that are unable to meet in a home. The resumption of Wednesday Prayer Meeting. The resumption of the Men's Saturday Morning Bible Study. The resumption of the Conquer meetings. All of these gatherings must adhere to strict social distancing. They cannot exceed 25 persons. All participants are strenuously encouraged to wear masks. There will be no singing.
- Guidelines will be published regarding the use of church facilities. There will be strict limits on the number of gatherings that can be held at the church during the week. All gatherings are to limit their meetings to 90 minutes or less.

Phase Two (When our area is in Green)

- We will begin using the sanctuary for limited worship. The worship will not be conducted live, but will be a hybrid of live preaching and pre-recorded worship music**. All attendees must pre-register to attend. A prerequisite to attending is that you agree to wear a mask*. If you are unable to wear a mask for any reason, you will not be able to attend. There will be no singing. Strict social distancing will be observed*. This means that seating will be marked off to keep appropriate distances. Dismissal will be row by row, guided by the ushers, starting with the last row. Pastors and/or elders will be present during the service.
- All of the regathering options in Phase One will continue.

Phase Three (Labor Day/Early September)

- Assuming it is safe to do so based on CDC, State of Pennsylvania, and the best practices in schools and businesses, we would begin conducting live worship services. This is a hope based on what we know and anticipate at this time. Social distancing will have to be practiced. The wearing of masks may be strongly encouraged but may not be required.
- All of the regatherings in Phase One would continue with the possible relaxing of size restrictions.
- Livestreaming of the worship service will continue.
- Resumption of committee meetings at the church as well as other gatherings.
- No non-ministry gatherings would be allowed at the church (i.e. family parties or other types of gatherings).

- It is not known if Calvary Kids or Wednesday evening programs would resume at this time.

***A Word About Mask Wearing & Social Distancing**

We feel that the act of wearing a mask and practicing social distancing is an act of Christian charity and a visible manifestation of preferring another above yourself. We realize that there are reasons why people cannot or choose not to wear a mask but, except for children and those who have health concerns, we ask that all of us wear masks out respect for others. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:10 “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” In Philippians 2:3 he writes, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” And in Galatians 5:13 he says, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” The message of the scriptures is unmistakable, all of our behavior should be characterized by our love for others, putting their interests ahead of our own. By our wearing a mask in our gatherings and strictly observing social distancing we are making a simple yet profound statement about how much we love each other.

With the above in mind, it is our goal, in our gatherings, to create a “safe space.” This means a physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe place to be. At no time and for no reason should anyone who comes on our campus ever feel that they are at risk. Calvary Church must be a place where the threats and concerns of the world around us are held at bay, and that one has indeed entered a sanctuary that is secure. This will provide an environment where people are free to worship our God.

It is our hope that we as a community will use this time show what true Christlike love is.

****Rationale for No Singing During Worship**

Singing aerosolizes respiratory droplets extraordinarily well. Deep-breathing while singing facilitates those respiratory droplets getting deep into the lungs. Singing in enclosed environments enhances this risk as well as remaining there for prolonged periods of time. Some of the more serious outbreaks of the Coronavirus have happened at choirs, funerals, and events where singing took place.