



## **REGROUP**

### **COVID-19 REGATHERING PLAN**

*We exist to glorify and enjoy God by making disciples who make a difference through grace-filled worship, community, and missions.*

#### **VISION**

Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have sought to BE the church, finding new and creative ways to continue our mission when we could not meet in person. Our ministry plans may change, but our vision does not! We have remained open in this season, even if we could not be in person, so we're referring to these efforts not as reopening, but as *regathering*.

The next season of our church will **align our programs, leaders, budget, and facility for a rolling physical regathering**; taking us from online only to gathering in increasingly large groups until all restrictions are lifted. Our approach to the phases of regathering is summarized by our children's ministry tagline: *Keep 'em safe; Show 'em Jesus*.

This approach seeks to care for our people and our neighbors while continuing to engage them in effective ministry - making disciples who make a difference through grace-filled worship, community, and missions. We can't wait to worship together again - as the physical church family Jesus intended us to be. In all our plans, we are praying and asking God for wisdom, courage, and joy as we follow him through uncertainty.

This plan considers at least four areas: 1) *Principles*, 2) *Expectations*, 3) *Research and Industry Context*, 4) *Ministry Response* - for worship, community, missions, and ministry support.



## SECTION 1: PRINCIPLES

The following three principles establish a framework that will direct decisions in this ever-evolving situation. They are:

1. **Proceed with love and flexibility** (Jn. 13:35, Eph. 4:2, Rom. 12:10). We will charitably navigate different levels of health and vulnerability within our church family, as well as different levels of comfort regarding regathering and social distancing. There is room for different opinions and concerns and this is an opportunity for the church to have unity without uniformity in a time of polarization and tribalism.
2. **Respect for governing authorities** (Jer. 29:7, Rom. 13:1, 1 Pet. 2:13). We will weigh the advice of federal, state and county officials for reopening, with particular attention to guidance for our local context and to counsel from medical professionals (e.g., CDC). We will seriously consider best practices as set by local schools/daycares for reopening children's ministry. We will fully comply with all guidelines regarding social distancing, size of gatherings, etc.
3. **Prioritize sustainability of people** (Gen. 1:28, Pr. 21:20, Lk. 14:28). Our decisions will focus on creating a sustainable pace and approach, making the best use of key resources, including staff and volunteer safety, time, and bandwidth, as well as the capabilities of our facility (availability of cleaning supplies, feasibility of cleaning practices, etc.). We want to give adequate attention to our ongoing ministries and allow sufficient time to properly prepare and train for regathering.



## SECTION 2: EXPECTATIONS

We want to be proactive and intentional, but, as this situation is ever-evolving, we also want to be prudent, planning well but also planning judiciously, as many details will never come to fruition. This is the balance of leading within uncertainty - being prepared for multiple trajectories and flexible in execution. Assumptions include:

1. **No one really knows what to expect** and uncertainty will likely continue for the next year or so. We should expect the situation to fluctuate and change. We may end up sheltering in place again at some point. Our ministries will need to continue to respond to and evolve with a changing situation and will maintain any new best practices that have developed along the way.
2. **We anticipate a rolling regathering and return of people**, e.g., gatherings allowed in increasing numbers: 10 >> 50 >> 150 >> 250 >> full services. We also anticipate that people will return gradually, requiring a “blended” approach of digital and physical strategies.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Full services and ministry schedules seem unlikely until late summer or fall<sup>2</sup>.** Smaller groups may be able to gather in mid/late summer, but full services seem very unlikely until late summer or early fall. We have phases in this plan, but not firm dates.
4. **Prioritization will be key for alignment.** Throughout this process, we will continue to prioritize the key contexts for discipleship: participating in worship, being involved in community, and engaging in missions. Our commitment to these ministry contexts directs how we prioritize our ministry programs. *Five areas receive prioritization in the allocation of staff time, budget and facility use<sup>3</sup>:* Sunday worship, preaching, children’s and student ministries, Community Groups, and service opportunities here and around the globe

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<sup>1</sup> The [Senior Pastor’s Guide to Reopening](#) by Church Fuel, p. 19

<sup>2</sup> Based on the phases of the [Forward Virginia](#) reopening plan. The governor has [noted](#) that phases may last 2 - 4 weeks or more.

<sup>3</sup> From “The Things That Matter Most” by the Capital Pres Family, 2020



### SECTION 3: RESEARCH & INDUSTRY CONTEXT

The task force consulted over 40 resources, including research, articles, and webinars from industry, medical, government, and leadership organizations. Local churches of similar sizes, other churches in our denomination, and churches around the country were also consulted as we developed our plan. This research – which will be continually applied throughout the various phases – led us to adopt a gradual, measured approach to re-opening. High-level findings include:

1. **Churches of varying sizes can have different challenges.** Complexities for larger multisite churches include logistics (such as managing limited capacity services, communications, and technology), recruiting and training the necessary volunteers, and securing essential provisions (bleach, masks, soap dispensers, etc.) for sanitation and protection.
2. **The experience of a socially distanced worship service can be deflating and disappointing.** It is difficult to meet expectations (and requirements) because it is challenging for services to feel simultaneously *welcoming* (no contact and scattered), *safe* (line queues and masks), and *engaging* (singing with masks on). It also creates an environment where staff and volunteers have to “police” social distancing.
3. **Extensive short-term efforts for short-lived problems can short-circuit ministry effectiveness.** Enhanced cleaning and technology needs that are necessitated by the current environment will generate additional costs and training requirements. Even a limited regathering will require significant resources and exponential numbers of volunteers, pulling staff away from current ministries. As one resource points out, it is easy to exhaust resources solving temporary problems<sup>4</sup>.
4. **There is research emerging that singing may be a particular risk for spreading COVID-19.**<sup>5</sup> This research, taken alongside the difficulties of disinfecting a large space with abundant soft surfaces and adequately ventilating older spaces like the Sanctuary, make hosting services and ministries a challenging undertaking.
5. **Regathering too early can send the wrong message to the community.** If COVID-19 is spread via our church services and ministries, it doesn’t just affect our church; our church could be a hot spot that spreads the disease into several communities. We don’t want to appear reckless to our city as we seek to share the gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> The [Senior Pastor’s Guide to Reopening](#) by Church Fuel, p. 24

<sup>5</sup> See [“Is Congregational Singing Dangerous?”](#) The Gospel Coalition, May 7, 2020; [“When Your Church Reopens, Here’s How to Meet Safely.”](#) Christianity Today, May 6, 2020; and [“The Risks – Know Them – Avoid Them.”](#) Erin Bromage, May 6, 2020.



## SECTION 4: MINISTRY RESPONSE<sup>6,7</sup>

Following principle two, our phases are aligned with the phase numbers in the [VA Forward](#) plan. As of May 28, 2020, Northern VA is in phase 0; for clarity, the current phase for our church is phase 0. Decisions to progress to the next phase will be made by the Session based on the current phase for our area as well as our internal readiness to meet necessary guidelines and our congregation's willingness to gather.

	<b>PHASE 0</b> 3/16 - 6/10	<b>PHASE 1</b> 6/10 - ?	<b>PHASE 2</b> TBD	<b>PHASE 3</b> TBD
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>Online</b>	<b>Online</b>	<b>Online/In Person</b>	<b>In Person</b>
COVID SCENARIO	Cases Increasing	Cases steady or decreasing	Cases decreasing	Significant decrease or containment
MAX FOR GROUPS	10	As instructed	As instructed	No size limit
SOCIAL DISTANCING	Strict	Limited	Moderate	New Normal
VULNERABLE POP.*	As Instructed	As Instructed	As Instructed	Discretionary

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

STAFF	Teleworking	Essential only, socially distanced	In shifts, socially distanced	Normal operation
WORSHIP SERVICES	Online Only	Online Only/In Person for training	Limited In Person and Online	In Person/Online
FORMATION & CARE	Online Only	Online Only and Limited in Person	Online and In Person	In Person
COMMUNITY GROUPS	Online Only	Possible In Person and Online	In Person/Online	In Person
CHILDREN 0 - 6th Grades	Online Only	Online Only	Online Only	In Person
STUDENTS 7th - 12th Grades	Online Only	Possible off-campus group activities	Off/On-campus activities with social distancing	In Person
MEETINGS	Online Only	Online Only	In Person/Online, social distancing	In Person/Online
SPECIAL EVENTS	Online Only	Online Only	Off-campus, social distancing; On-campus, case-by-case	In Person
MISSIONS TRIPS	Postponed	Postponed	Possible domestic trips with restrictions	Possible domestic & international trips with restrictions

\*Vulnerable Population: As defined by the Centers for Disease Control.

<sup>6</sup> Based on a chart created and shared by Mark Satterfield at [The Glade Church](#), TN

<sup>7</sup> Vulnerable populations here are [as defined by the Centers for Disease Control](#). "Guidelines for Opening Up America Again," released by the White House, provide specific guidance for vulnerable populations in each phase.



## **FAQs**

### **What measures will you take to screen attendees before services?**

We will provide a questionnaire (based on guidance put forth the VA Department of Public Health) and ask all attendees to self-evaluate before attending. Signs on our property will communicate this as well. Due to the complexity of accurately taking temperatures while social distancing for a large number of worshipers, we will likely not be taking temperatures on our premises.

### **How will this work for our Fairfax site?**

Our hope is to keep both our McLean and Fairfax sites in the same phase at the same time. We are working closely with Inova to determine what restrictions will be in place at our Fairfax meeting site and will keep you posted as more details are available.

### **What will children's ministry look like in phase 3?**

That depends both on the restrictions still in place in phase 3, as well as the best practices and strategies chosen by area schools and day cares. Our goal is to have as many age groups up and running as possible, potentially phasing them in over the course of several weeks. We are planning for several scenarios, paying close attention to local school systems, and will have details for families as we get closer to phase 3.

### **When will weekday ministries be back in session?**

We will likely start phasing back in smaller classes and studies in phase 2, depending on the state restrictions in that phase. We expect most ministries to be up and running in phase 3.

### **What will cleaning and disinfecting look like between services?**

CDC guidelines will be followed and as many surfaces as possible will be wiped down. Rooms for worship will also be well ventilated. A specific cleaning checklist will be posted when we enter phase 2 so you can see what measures are being taken.

### **How will you handle cleaning bathrooms?**

This is an area of particular concern and attention as we review the plan for our facility. If we believe it is unsafe to have bathrooms open, we will not open the building. When we feel we are able to safely open bathrooms, we are looking into making them as touchless as possible, limiting occupancy, and disinfecting between services.

### **How will you determine who comes to which service? Do I really need to attend the specific service to which I am invited?**

We are currently considering multiple approaches, including a specific service for vulnerable populations. As we determine the best course, we will communicate how we will approach this area. We do ask that you attend the specific service to which you are invited as that will allow us to properly take part in contact tracing, should it be needed.



**Can I invite friends?**

Yes! We are making plans so that we will still have space for newcomers in our services. It is always a good time to invite your friends to experience the gospel with us!

**Will worship stay online?**

Yes! We recognize that many people will choose to worship online for several months to come. We will maintain our online worship service in much the same way we have it right now.

**When can I come to the church building to meet with staff, utilize the library, etc?**

The McLean property will be open to church members in phase 2, by appointment.





## SELECTED REFERENCES

- [“8 Things To Consider As You Begin Planning To Reopen Your Church,”](#) Smart Church Management, April 8, 2020
- [“24 Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return,”](#) Ken Braddy, April 18, 2020
- [“Church Campus Reopening Conversation Guide,”](#) SBC of Virginia
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- [“Opening Up America Again,”](#) whitehouse.gov
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- [“The Risks – Know Them – Avoid Them,”](#) Erin Bromage, May 6, 2020.
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- [“Singing, the Church, and COVID-19: A Caution for Moving Forward in Our Current Pandemic,”](#) Dr. Heather R. Nelson
- [The \*Senior Pastor’s Guide to Reopening\*](#) by Church Fuel
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- [“When Your Church Reopens. Here’s How to Meet Safely,”](#) Christianity Today, May 6, 2020