

A Vision for Reassembling

The Ministry Leadership Team is excited to share our vision for resuming our in-person gatherings.

Why are we moving toward resuming in-person gatherings?

On Friday, March 15, the Ministry Leadership Team made the decision to suspend our in-person gatherings. This decision was made in response to a request from the Montgomery County Commissioners who were working to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus in our county. We believed that honoring this request was a practical way for us to honor our governmental leaders (I Timothy 2:1-8) and to express love for our community and concern for their well-being. While we have sought to honor the guidelines (and continue to do so), the decision to suspend our in-person gatherings was not something they could require of us. It was a gift we freely gave to our community and community leaders.

It is also a gift we have given to many of us at Grace who may be among those most vulnerable to Covid-19. It has been one way for us to apply the admonition Philippians 2:4, to *“look out not merely for our own interests but also for the interests of others”* as well as I Corinthians 13:4-5, *“Love is patient, love is kind... and it does not seek its own.”*

At the same time, we also acknowledge our Biblical admonition to *“not forsake our own assembling... and to encourage one another.”* (Hebrews 10:25). We recognize the mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual toll that this extended period of isolation has had on many of us in different ways – the deep sense of loneliness and hopelessness some have experienced. Perhaps this time has showed us that the call not to forsake our assembling is not mere legalism, but that fellowship meets some of the most basic needs we have. So much of our Christian faith is experienced in close proximity of relationship (i.e. Matthew 19:13-15; Romans 16:16; John 13:14; Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 8:43-46; Luke 6:17-19; Luke 22:14-20). While we have sought to address this need during the quarantine as best as we could, we recognize that many of us have suffered lack in this area of Biblical priority.

As an expression of our care for you, we recently asked for your response to a survey. What we heard was that a strong majority (67%) do desire to begin reassembling, but that a significant number of us also want provisions in our gathering to enhance health and safety. About 30% of us are not yet ready to join in-person. We recognize that when it comes to the question of when and how we resume our corporate worship gatherings, there is no one size that fits all.

As we now move to resume our in-person gatherings, we do so seeking to hold these two Biblical priorities together: the need to care for the vulnerable among us and the need to meet the fellowship needs of our members. We also want to affirm that that people are at different places in their sense of readiness. We desire to bring church to each of us at our place of need as best as we can.

How are we going to reassemble?

The most important way we are going to reassemble is in the spirit of Romans 14, affirming mutual concern and mutual liberty. Regardless of where each of us may be at in our readiness to reassemble, *“to not judge one another, but to resolve not to put a stumbling block in each other’s way.”* (Romans 14:3) And to *“pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”* (Romans 14:19).

We want to share a plan that affirms each person's level of readiness to reassemble and their felt needs in doing so, particularly in the short term. This plan will involve 3 phases. An eased-in approach will allow for time and room to better assess the environment and make adjustments to needs as they may arise.

Basic considerations:

- * No one should feel any pressure to participate in any phase sooner than they feel ready.
- * Throughout each phase we will continue to record our services. These will be viewed in a "Sunday Evening service."
- * Wednesday Morning Zoom Prayer Meeting will continue

Basic health considerations:

- * No one who is immunocompromised should feel pressure to attend.
- * If you are at all ill – exhibiting symptoms of fever, coughing, sneezing, breathing difficulties, or any other illness – please choose to participate in our evening recorded service.
- * We will be adding hand sanitizer stations in the Grace building.
- * We will be taking extra care in the cleanliness of the building.

Phase 1: (June 14- June 28)

Organization:

- * Sunday morning worship – We will schedule small group (25 people) worship services at the church. We will have 3 services of 45 minutes each, at 8:30am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 a.m.. These time slots provide a 30-minute window between each service to allow for transitioning and cleaning of the sanctuary and bathrooms. Please sign up for **June 14** by [clicking here](#) or call Karen at the office .
- * We will attempt a Sharing Time in Phase 1.
- * There will be no nursery, on-site Sunday School classes, or Jr. Church.
- * Sunday School classes would still take place via Zoom at a time and day agreed upon by the classes.

Precautions for inside the building:

- * An usher will seat members and families with respectful distancing (families may sit together);
- * We ask all attending to wear a face mask while they are in the church building . Children and those who medically cannot wear a mask are exempt.
- * We believe singing is important even for Phase 1. However, though the worship leader and pastor will not be wearing masks while up on the stage, we will utilize one Worship Leader in Phase 1 (not a worship team).
- * No hymn books or pew Bibles will be used.
- * No bulletins will be passed out.
- * Offering will be a plate(s) made available in the back of the sanctuary.
- * Greetings will consist of alternatives to hugs and handshakes.
- * As weather permits, doors and windows will be opened allowing for ventilation.
- * We encourage fellowship and conversations take place outdoors after the services.
- * The pews and other surfaces in the sanctuary, doors, and bathrooms will be cleaned between services.

Meeting other needs:

We encourage group activities such as Youth groups, Bible study groups, or kinds of gatherings of up to 25 people, and that these take place out-doors or in larger venues.

Pastoral care: Grace pastors will resume personal visitation and appointments for persons who request it.

Outside of formal Grace events, we encourage Christian fellowship to take place in each other's homes or other social venues.

Phase 2: (July 5 - August 30)

Organization:

- * Sunday morning worship – we will hold two (2) services Sunday morning.
- * Order and content of these services will be much more in keeping with our “traditional practices.”
- * There will be no staffed nursery, on-site Sunday School classes, or Jr. Church.
- * Nursery would be open for families and children – children being taken care of by parents or grandparents.
- * Sunday School classes would still take place via Zoom at a time and day agreed upon by the classes.

Precautions for inside the building:

- * Seating will still be spaced, though not as rigidly distanced as Phase 1.
- * Greetings will still consist of alternatives to hugs and handshakes.
- * Offering will be a plate made available in the back of the sanctuary.
- * As weather permits, doors and windows will be opened to allow for ventilation.
- * MLT asks that you wear a mask as you enter and exit the church building . It is not necessary you wear one seated in the pews.

Meeting other needs:

We encourage group activities such as Youth groups, Bible study groups, or other kinds of gatherings to take place.

While outdoor options are preferable, smaller groups can use the church facilities by scheduling it through the church office (to prevent overlap of scheduling and allow for timely, adequate cleaning).

Outside of formal Grace events, we encourage Christian fellowship to take place in each other's homes or other social venues.

Phase 3: (September 7)

Organization:

- * Sunday morning services will resume largely as they were prior to March 15, with one joint service.
- * Sunday School classes will resume for all ages.
- * Nursery and Jr. Church will resume.

Precautions:

- * Persons can be seated at a distance of *their* comfort.
- * Persons should greet with *their own* level of comfort.
- * Continued extra care will be given to the cleanliness of the facility.

These precautions and guidelines will be reviewed by MLT routinely throughout the summer months if changes are needed we will communicate them via email or phone tree.

Rainbow Express Preschool will be starting June 8. In general parents will not be allowed in the building only children and staff and they will not be wearing masks while in the building. Any Grace member that

comes to the building during the week while REPS is in session may be screened with some questions and also have a temperature taken . This is a government guideline for REPS.

Where are we going?

Nobody has ever been down this road before. In order to navigate this faithfully, we will pray together and work together to make right decisions, seeking to walk with the counsel of other congregations, respecting government guidelines, but with the conviction of carrying out our Biblical admonitions in order to fulfill the mission of making disciples with our vision of being Christ's hands and feet in the world every day in the full expression of Christian fellowship.