

Dear MBC,

As you know by now, we are planning to resume our “in person” church services starting this Sunday, May 17. Although they are going to look quite different than before this crisis, we are excited to begin meeting again to corporately worship our great God and Savior! Below are a number of details about the upcoming service.

**The Summary** – Based on the responses we received from the email sent out earlier this week, 161 people stated that they are planning to attend this Sunday’s service. We will be able to accommodate that many people in **1 service this Sunday at the normal time (9:30 – 11:00 am)**. At this point, we are at capacity for one service so we encourage those who have not signed up yet to watch online. We are committed to adhering to the CDC guidelines for safe gatherings including the 6-foot social distancing requirement. As a result, those who signed up to attend church this Sunday will be divided into 3 groups (approximately 50 each in the auditorium, upper level classrooms, lower level classrooms). Please read the attachment that has the room you have been assigned to for this Sunday’s service. Specific details about how all this will work are below.

**The Cautions** – We want to reiterate again that, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms (cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea) or are sick in any other way, we ask you to stay home. Additionally, while the decision to attend “in-person” worship services is up to you, those in a higher risk category (i.e. those over 65 years old and those with underlying medical conditions, including lung disease/asthma, heart conditions, diabetes, kidney or liver disease, and those immunocompromised) should consider watching the services via livestream rather than risking exposure. Because of this, about half of our elders will not be attending.

**The Decision** – Some have wondered how the elders decided to resume “in person” services at this time. Please know that we have not rushed into this decision nor have we made it lightly. We acknowledge that there is a risk in gathering together and the last thing we want is for someone to get sick at MBC or for an outbreak to happen at our church. So, for the last 9 weeks we have abided by the “stay at home” order by the governor. We have done this for a number of reasons: 1) We want to follow passages like Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, and Titus 3:1-2 and submit to our leaders. Even if we haven’t agreed with all of the decisions and guidelines, we want to be obedient to the governing authorities as Scripture requires of us as this honors the Lord and reflects our conviction that we believe God has placed the authorities in their position. Thus, submission to them is submission to Him. Furthermore, we don’t believe the governmental guidelines have in any way singled out churches as other public gatherings (sports events, schools, concerts, etc.) have also been restricted. This has been done to protect

life; therefore, we have sought to obey the government. 2) We wanted to protect anyone from getting sick at MBC and allow time for the curve to flatten. 3) We want to be a good testimony to our neighbors and not do anything to discredit our ability to proclaim the Gospel in our community.

Throughout the last few weeks, the elders have been discussing the right time to assemble again for “in person” services. We didn’t believe a combative approach (i.e. choosing to meet despite the governor’s executive order) would have been appropriate due to the reasons noted in the previous paragraph. We also don’t believe a strictly compliant approach (i.e. choosing to meet only when we are told we can) is appropriate either because it might be months, perhaps even a year, before we could meet again. So, we have chosen a cooperative approach, meaning we have abided by the restrictions and guidelines given to us up to this point but have also assembled a plan to begin meeting again when we think that is appropriate. Our elders met Monday night to discuss this and are in unanimous agreement that now is that time. Obviously, the primary reason for this is so that we can resume corporate worship of the Lord (fulfilling Hebrews 10:25), the public proclamation of the Word (fulfilling 2 Timothy 4:2), the practice of the one-anothers in true biblical fellowship, the exercise of spiritual gifts (fulfilling Romans 12:3-8), the shepherding of the flock by the elders (fulfilling 1 Peter 5:1-3), and the observance of the ordinances (baptism and communion). Legally, we are able to do this because of the most recent executive order by the governor ([https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIEOG/2020/05/07/file\\_attachments/1446124/EO%202020-77.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIEOG/2020/05/07/file_attachments/1446124/EO%202020-77.pdf)). Specifically, number 16 on page 16 of that order states, “*Consistent with prior guidance, neither a place of religious worship nor its owner is subject to penalty under section 20 of this order for allowing religious worship at such place. No individual is subject to penalty under section 20 of this order for engaging in or traveling to engage in religious worship at a place of religious worship, or for violating section 15(a) of this order.*” Though the stay at home order is still in effect until May 28, we believe this statement allows churches and its members to practice their First Amendment privileges.

Although we have decided to meet starting this Sunday, it is important to remember that the stay at home order is still in effect and that the exemption from any penalty for gathering for a worship service applies only to the actual worship service. That means that we are still not allowed to hang out in groups outside of the worship service. Basically, all that we are able to do at this point is to gather for a corporate worship service, fellowship for a short time, and then depart to still honor the stay at home order.

**The Clarification** – Although we plan to meet, we do know that some people are still concerned about this virus and won’t be attending the “in person” worship services for quite some time. Please know that we fully support anyone who chooses to stay at home for the

foreseeable future to livestream the services. Each person needs to abide by their conscience in the decision to attend or not. As a result, it is imperative that we as a body respect each person's choice in this matter. We must not let this issue divide us along preferential lines, something Satan would love to do. We must extend a lot of grace and love to each other during this time as we all have different perspectives and opinions about this crisis. So, let's guard against being critical of those who hold differing opinions or political convictions. Let's be careful to hold our preferences loosely and to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Let's ensure that we don't in some way "shame" those who choose not to attend "in person" services immediately. Also, please bear with the elders as we try to navigate this crisis wisely and work through a variety of details. Everything may not always go as smoothly as we would like!

**The Details** – Here are some specific details about how this Sunday's service will occur:

- Please note what room you are assigned to in the attachment and enter that room through the following entrances: 1) For the auditorium, use the main front double doors; 2) For the upper level classrooms (UL1-3), use the office entrance (single door at the front of the building); 3) For the lower level classrooms (LL1-3), walk alongside the south side of the building, down the steps, around the back, and enter the addition by the single door in the back. There will be signs directing you.
- Once you enter the building, we encourage you to go to your room and not congregate in high traffic areas.
- Once you enter your room, please stay in that room for the duration of the service (you will not be able to go to the other rooms).
- If you need to use the restrooms and you are in the auditorium or the lower level classrooms, use the facilities off of the auditorium; if you are in the upper level classrooms, use the facilities in the upper level.
- Families will need to stay together and sit together the whole time they are in the building.
- Each meeting room will have rows of chairs that will be spaced 6 feet apart for social distancing. We also ask you to keep 2-3 chairs between your family and the next family in your row. There will be ushers in each room to help you if you need it.
- The elevator will not be available.
- There will be no nursery or children's ministry.
- An elder will be available in each room if you have any needs.
- The final Equipping Hour for Bob's "How People Change" class will be held this Sunday from 11:15 am – 12:00 pm. It will be done in the auditorium so you can stay and watch that in your assigned room or you can watch it from home on livestream (live or recorded).

**The Safety** – Here are the safety precautions we are taking to keep everyone as safe as possible.

- The building will be thoroughly cleaned each week, including wiping down handrails, door handles, and cleaning bathrooms.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance to each room and we encourage you to use it.
- We encourage you to wear a mask (perhaps especially during singing) but we will not "police" those that chose not to wear one.
- Please remember to practice social distancing (6 feet apart) at all times while in the building (including the time before and after the service).
- When we celebrate communion together, we will have prepackaged elements placed on the chairs to prevent having to pass the plates.
- No offerings will be collected but there will be boxes at the back of each room for you to place your offering in. Or you may continue sending them in the mail or giving online.
- No physical bulletins will be available. They will continue to be sent electronically a few days before the Sunday service.
- Weather permitting, doors will remain open to prevent you from having to open them and to allow fresh air into the building.
- There will be no coffee or snacks available after the service for a while.
- The drinking fountains will be turned off for a while.
- After the service, please dismiss yourselves in a way that avoids congregating together.
- If anyone tests positive for COVID-19 and you have attended an MBC worship service, please let the elders know.

I think that's it for now. Sorry for all the information. If you have any questions, please let us know. We love you and look forward to seeing many of you face to face on Sunday!

By His Grace and for His Glory,

Todd Dykstra

Teaching Pastor, Maranatha Bible Church