

April 25, 2020

Dear City Reformed,

It's been about 40 days since our lives were turned upside down by the Coronavirus. I find it hard to keep track of time, but I've been numbering the Sunday sermons. This Sunday will be COVID Sermon #7, so we'll be starting our seventh week of lock-down. (Counting from when the schools closed and we began to livestream Sunday Services.)

We are probably all asking the same questions right now: *When will this end? What happens next? Why do I have so much toilet paper?* God alone knows the answer to those questions. But, I wanted to write to you about what has been happening with City Reformed, and things that our church leadership is trying to anticipate as we go forward.

Where we have been

This has been a truly unprecedented time for our generation. We can say that so far, thankful, our region has been spared the surge in COVID-19 cases that we had so much feared. Social distancing has worked, prayers have been answers, perhaps there will be a second wave. But it has been hard. To my knowledge, no member of City Reformed has tested positive for COVID-19. Yet. But some have lost friends and family. Some of our people have shifted to work from home, some are doing essential work in hospitals and other vital services, and some have been furloughed. Again, all of these circumstances have been hard; and this doesn't even account for the emotional toll. In some cases, we are cooped up with a lot of people, or with difficult people. In other cases, there is profound isolation. It may take some time to see the hidden costs of this period.

But we have also seen tremendous commitment. Many of our members are trudging to work to help support a medical system that is grappling with this unpredictable situation. Others are trudging to their kitchen tables to work and teach and learn on their laptops. Some of us are scrambling for loans and trying to keep things afloat.

Some of us are grappling with deep loneliness. We miss each other, but in the midst of it all so many have reached out. Phone calls have been made, countless zoom meetings attended. Cards written. Meals delivered. Gifts sent. I have seen and heard of extraordinary kindness in this hard time. Members have continued to support our church and other important ministries in this difficult time.

God has used some unique gifts to help our worship service serve both our own congregation and those beyond. Our Sunday worship livestreams have been made possible by the quick thinking and hard work of our tech team. Ben Love and Andy Alexander have lead the way, with support from Zenny Jua, Mike Hilton, and Taylor Stein. Over the last six weeks, our services have had an extraordinary range number of hits, many weeks between 600-900 views. (Of course, some people watched part of it, then came back later. But others watched in groups. So it is hard to estimate a virtual "attendance.") Feedback I have gotten from emails and texts have revealed that people are tuning in to watch our worship service from around the world. Some old friends have joined us from beyond Pittsburgh. Others have streamed while their home church is gearing up for their own video stream. But others are casual attenders and spiritual seekers who are looking for encouragement in this challenging season.

Finally, our church has continued to be generous. Giving to the deacons fund and the general fund has not only remained strong but has increased in strength during this unstable time. That allows us to continue with plans for ministry expansion that were previously made (see below), but also to consider how God might be asking us to support others in this hard season.

Where we are going: Church Gatherings

The short answer is that we are preparing to continue our livestream service for Sunday Worship for the foreseeable future. This is because it seems unlikely that we can meet for a larger group worship service very soon, and also we anticipate that some of the most vulnerable people will need to stay home even when larger gatherings begin to phase back in. Here are some of the ways we hope to see things change as we go forward. In each case, we will await direction from our governing authorities and take into account the measurable risk factors of any meeting. Please understand, we

are not planning to rush any of these things. We simply recognize that these are realistic steps that we are looking for on the horizon at some point. It is not our role to make the key decisions that will allow this to happen, nor can we predict when this will unfold.

- At some point, we anticipate small groups of people beginning to meet in person. This could allow some community groups to resume meeting in person, if the numbers and space permit it.
- At some point, we anticipate being able to expand our Sunday morning worship attendance beyond 10 people. We would love to intentionally include members who are living alone or largely isolated from supportive community.
- At some point, we anticipate that members could gather in small settings to watch the livestream worship service together. Perhaps community groups will watch together.
- It will likely be some time later that we can truly open up the Sunday Worship Service.
- Even after Sunday Service opens, we are not sure if we would immediately return to WT. In the meantime, we are paying partial rent to honor our contract, but recognize that we cannot use the space.
- Even after our Sunday Service opens, we anticipate the need to enforce a robust sick policy, especially for children.
- Even after our Sunday Service opens, we anticipate that children's gatherings (nursery, Sunday school, children's church, etc.) could lag even further behind as it is difficult to enforce social distancing for a group of kids.
- Even after our Sunday Service opens, we anticipate that people who are medically vulnerable may not be able to return to large group gatherings. With that in mind, we are committed to continuing our livestream indefinitely.

Where we are going: *Other Ministries*

Community Groups: Will continue online until in-person meetings become possible. Some groups will change their schedule for the summer.

Sunday School: Charis will continue to provide resources for nursery and elementary age children through May (normally Sunday School ends in April). The elementary kids' resources will be a series on the Psalms to mirror the adult CE class on the Psalms for the next four weeks.

Vacation Bible School: Due to the pandemic, we are sadly not able to move ahead with plans for our traditional VBS ministry this summer 2020. While this is disappointing for our children and families, we remain hopeful that we can kick it off again next summer.

Zoom Call for Children with Matt & Chrissie: Sundays @ 12PM. Contact Charis@cityreformed for the Zoom link.

Wednesday Morning Prayer Wednesdays @ 8:30AM Via Zoom: tinyurl.com/CRPCpray prayer@cityreformed.org

Adult CE: By the Rivers of Babylon: Psalms for the Exiled- Thursday 4/30 @ 8PM. 4-part series through 5/21 Via Zoom: tinyurl.com/CRPCAdultEd

Agora Forum: Monday 4/27 @ 7PM on the "question of moral evil—why did Adam and Eve sin?" tinyurl.com/CRPCAgora

Middle School Youth Group: Continuing Zoom call on Mondays at 7PM.

(New) Women's Psalm Reading: Friday 5/1 @ 7PM. Contact Christy Heisler (cnheisler@gmail.com) for Zoom link.

Women's Ministry: Updates on the many other ongoing women's ministries are available on City Reformed Women's Facebook page.

Where we are going: *Ministry Investment*

God has continued to bless the ministry of City Reformed with personal growth, numerical growth, and financial growth. I recognize that can be said out of a spirit of pride, but that is not my intention. Rather, I want our members to know

that we have been, and seem to continue to be, in a growth cycle. This means methodical and intentional ministry expansion. Here are some things that are happening:

- In the weeks leading up to the COVID crisis, we had added ruling elder Jim Partridge to the staff as a Ministry Assistant. This information was lost in the flurry of pre-COVID concerns, but Jim has been active in establishing a new Staff Support Team and will be chairing the Missions Committee going forward. He will also be helping with men's discipleship. Jim is serving far beyond what a volunteer ruling elder would typically do, and it was appropriate to add him in a part-time staff position.
- Sandy Snoke has returned from overseas and her renewed efforts with women's ministry are appreciated.
- We have explored the possibility of an expanded role for a director of youth ministry, but those plans are on hold.

The deacons are working hard to support our members and to support community needs in this uncertain time. At the same time, we are progressing with plans to continue renovations of the Greenfield Sanctuary. This had been in the works prior to COVID-19, but again overshadowed. This is all the more important, now that we use the Greenfield building for livestream services. Having this building as a reliable backup seems vital. When work is allowed to resume we will proceed with the following renovations, mostly with professional workers:

- Painting the sanctuary (it is currently in a state of disrepair. Fortunately, the unpainted sections don't show up on the camera when we livestream, but it really needs to be fixed.) This was scheduled to happen just as businesses were being shut down, and it will be resumed soon.
- Updating and expanding the electrical system.
- Installing air conditioning for the sanctuary. (Currently, it gets prohibitively hot in there on some summer days.)
- Renovating the balcony to expand our seating capacity.
- Volunteer workers were being used to renovate the second floor area and open up that space for regular use. At some point that will be completed.
- The kitchen and downstairs fellowship hall are being prepared for more regular use, but without thorough renovations.

Finally, we are considering ways to support ministries beyond our own congregation.

We had supported a seminary student from Pittsburgh with our African American scholarship fund. The student recently graduated, is currently working in a vital ministry, and has expressed thankfulness for our support. We hope to continue this useful fund. (It should be noted, that City Reformed has a long history of supporting our own members who go to seminary and have need. This particular fund was established to extend our support to people from other parts of our city.)

We are taking steps to establish a church planting fund. This fund would offer ongoing support to current church plants that we support such as Mosaic PCA, and Redemption Hill PCA. But, this fund would also begin to accrue money that could be used for a future church plant that we hope to launch one day. At this point, plans are still far off and in tentative form, but we hope to continue sharing our hopes and dreams in this area. In the meantime, we are seeking to be aware of the needs of affiliated churches that are in areas particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

Keep pressing on. This is difficult, but we are not alone. The Lord is at hand, and he is at work.

In Christ,



Pastor Matt Koerber