

Friday, July 24, 2020

Dear City Reformed,

So much has happened during the last 4 months, and this has required regular updates from me. I've been a little quiet recently, and as I embark on a two-week period of vacation, I will try to rest and gather my strength for the coming Fall season of ministry. I anticipate having a lot more to write about as we move through August, but I wanted to give a quick update before I leave so that you know how some of the "gears are turning" in our plans for ministry preparation at City Reformed.

- 1.) You may have heard that I have struggled with sickness twice this month. As a result, I missed two Sundays in which I was scheduled to preach. I'm midway through my longest (and unintentional) break from preaching that I have had since my sabbatical. It is never fun to be sick, but there is added anxiety during a time when COVID infections are on the rise in our county. Fortunately, I had two tests that came back negative – showing no evidence of the Coronavirus. Last week, I was diagnosed with Lyme Disease and have been taking antibiotics with great benefit. For the first time in a couple of weeks I am starting to feel fully healthy and I am taking comfort from knowing that Lyme Disease is only contagious if I accidentally bite someone and do a tick impression for 24 hours.
- 2.) It was a great disappointment to be unable to go through with our open service on Sunday, July 5. As you remember, we had been planning the reopening of our morning worship service for weeks, but Allegheny County called for a cancellation of gatherings over 25 people and we had to continue holding our service by invitation only. We also began to realize that our hopes for the fall were not going to be realized in the ways that we had been planning. In response to the increase of infections in Allegheny County and increased concern by government officials at all levels, we recognize that we will need to think about ministry in creative ways. Last Sunday John McCombs preached about our urgent need for evangelism and witness during this time of uncertainty. He said that in order to accomplish that, we will need to be more decentralized and more creative. We hope that all of our members can pick up that challenge in their personal lives, but here are some ways we are seeking to do that together.
 - a. **"Open" and Outdoor PM Services.** We are finalizing the start date and location, but we are planning to make alterations to our PM service so that it can be conducted in a way that is open – that is anyone can come and we don't need to sign up. This will allow us to find ways to gather together in person and also receive communion. We are hoping to start this in mid-August and more details will hopefully be available soon. Essentially, it will be quite similar to our Easter Sunrise Service, but even shorter.
 - i. *The service will be held outside with a mandatory mask policy for everyone over two years old. (We feel this is essential for allowing an open gathering given the added risk of group singing.)*
 - ii. *The service will be significantly shortened, but will contain all of the basic elements of worship. (We will aim for a 30-35 min service.)*
 - iii. *Attendees will bring their own chairs and direction will be given to maintain a safe social distance.*
 - iv. *We intend to hold this service every other week, and communion will be served each time. (We will alter our procedures to ensure the safest possible distribution.)*
 - v. *The services will be intentionally short, thus allowing us to hold several each day, and to continue the service in less than optimal weather. (We will cancel if the weather is dangerous.)*
 - vi. *We plan to have multiple services, starting on the hour. (Perhaps 5:00 pm, 6:00 pm, and 7:00 pm.)*
 - vii. *We will aim to keep our service size to around 50 people, but we believe we can take enough safety precautions to allow our gatherings to continue to be safe if our attendance grows beyond that.*

- viii. *We will continue to hold our morning worship service as we have been doing and we will increase or decrease the numbers as medical concerns dictate.*
- b. **Picnics and Outdoor Gatherings.** We believe that there are safe ways to do picnics and other outdoor gatherings, particularly with smaller groups. We encourage our CGs and various ministries to pursue these options as ways to connect together and invite new people to attend. When our groups gather with food, we will follow our food guidelines. When there is no singing at the event, we have more flexibility to relax mask use in outdoor gatherings. Contact [Joseph](#) (CGs) and [Nameun](#) (Welcome Ministry) if you have more questions on outdoor gatherings.
- c. **Virtual Sunday School.** Because attendance at the morning service is still so variable, we are planning to begin our fall Sunday School season with a virtual Sunday School program. Charis is working to design a program that allows for quality content, flexibility and personal connections. Details will follow.
- 3.) Our budget year concluded at the end of June, and we have been working to allocate resources and determine the budget for the coming year. Because of the various outside factors, we are a little delayed in our official report, but we hope to provide that in August. In summary: our giving remained strong, our expenses were down, and we received some significant one time designated gifts. This has allowed us to move forward with ministry plans that we outlined during the spring.
- a. *We are expanding our missions influence by supporting more missionaries and even helping to send missionaries during this current pandemic.*
- b. *We are making capital improvements in the building and we are paying down our mortgage, thus freeing up future budget resources for ministry.*
- c. *We are seeking to expand our ministry, in particular our youth ministry and women's ministry.*
- d. *We have established a church planting fund, we are seeking to better partner with current church plants, and we are evaluating our own long term plans for CRPC to church plant again.*

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Pastor Matt