

Answering the Call

Dear Friends,

It is time for the churches of Southwestern Pennsylvania to reopen their doors for public ministry!

Behind the scenes, the local church has continued to serve the people of our communities in remarkable ways through virtual gatherings, livestream worship services, and a myriad of other expressions of love and care from food distribution to prayer and phone connections on a daily basis.

Even though churches were designated as “essential services” by state government officials, virtually all of them have voluntarily closed their doors in the interest of public health and safety from covid-19.

Now, it is clear from most recent health data that we are seeing a rapid decline in cases and loss of life in our area with virtually no deaths reported under the age of 30 according to CDC and the Commonwealth of PA statistics. This could change, however, and we will continue to monitor public health data and respond accordingly.

Reopening will take patience, grace, affirmation and unity as we navigate the next weeks and months together. What we may lack in terms of **certainty** about the virus, we will seek to offset with great **clarity** about the values that we share.

Here are some of the things we affirm together:

- First, standing together with other churches is a great testimony to the communities that surround us. This is not a competition to be first to reopen.
- Second, every church will have a different timeline and details about regathering in our buildings. Different is distinctive and necessary, as no two churches are exactly alike in the variables they navigate as they make these determinations.
- Some churches will begin a reopening process almost immediately and some will have services on Pentecost Sunday, May 31. Others may take more time to do so but let’s celebrate every opening together, and not critique or compare our church’s plan with someone else’s. The plan for regathering and opening for ministry is not a measurement of being Spirit led or faith driven, but of a desire to respond according to how God has equipped each congregation uniquely.
- We are committed to providing special care for the most vulnerable populations in our communities and will do everything possible to provide safe and secure environments for those populations, including our children’s ministries. We recognize the unique challenge and responsibility to protect, care for and share Christ’s love with every one of these precious souls.
- For those who do not yet sense it is time to join in any group activities or public worship at the church facility, we understand and will continue to do our best to provide online experiences and other services going forward until all are free to return.

We earnestly pray that our churches will be distinguished by unity, affirmation and love for one another; and do everything possible to help our church leaders toward their goal of gradually, but fully reopening our facilities to serve the needs of the amazing people of the Greater Pittsburgh area.

We all agree that this is the time where John 17:23 will be our testimony:

“May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you love me.” (Jesus)

Affirmed herein by the undersigned:

Bishop Joseph Garlington, Covenant Church of Pitt.
Steven Parkhill, South Canonsburg Church
Mark Moder, Berean Church

Buck Schafer, Grace Life Church
Bill Anzevino, Christian Assembly Church
Jeff Leake, Allison Park Church

Matt Kaltenberger, Grace Community Church
Rick Paladin, Bridge City Church
John Nuzzo, Victory Family Church
Chris Marshall, New Life Christian
Dave D'Angelo, Northway Christian Community
Sam DeMarco, New Brighton Christian Assembly
Kurt Bjorklund, Orchard Hill Church
Curt Seaburg, Victory Church
Larry Bettencourt, Champion Life Church

Jason Howard, Amplify Church
Jack Owen, North Boroughs Church
Ralph Vogel, Church at the Heights
Mel Masengale, Summit Church
Craig Gyergyo, Christ Church at Grove Farms
Rev, Dr Stan Keehlwetter, Plain Grove Presby. Church
Cliff Reynolds, Word Alive Church
Jason Lamer, Faith Assembly