

## **May 28th COVID-19 UPDATE FROM THE SESSION**

To the beloved saints of Tyrone Church,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We want you to know that, as a session of elders, we regularly give thanks for you all when we come together in prayer, both for your faith in Christ Jesus and for your partnership with us in the gospel until now. It has pained us dearly to be separated from you these past few months, causing us to yearn all the more to meet with you face to face in order to share our affection for you in Christ Jesus.

Recently, many of you have been asking when we might be able to meet together again as a church. We assure you that we have been praying and discussing these things as session for well over a month now and have been listening to you and to each other in terms of our desires, our concerns and even our fears. We have purposely been treading cautiously for a number of reasons. Not only have we read in the news of more recent outbreaks of the virus in churches that have reopened their services in the last few weeks, we also have recently discovered that at least two of our own members had contracted the virus back in March and very likely would have spread it to a number of others in our congregation had we not discontinued our public worship services when we did.

We also have been taking into consideration both the executive orders of our state and the guidelines provided for us by the federal government through the CDC. We do not believe that either government is persecuting the church in any particular way in regards to this virus. They are merely trying to protect their citizens from grave and mortal danger. Obviously, our secular leaders will have a different worldview than us and will come to a different conclusion on a number of things, such as what should or should not be open at this time, based upon that worldview, but they have not sought to stamp out the Church or to hinder worship unnecessarily.

In regards to Governor Whitmer's executive orders, they have continually stated that a church's violation of the order is not considered to be a misdemeanor as other gatherings or assemblies would be, thus the Church is not being singled out for punishment but given an exception that does not pertain to other audiences. However, although we have been granted an exception, the session itself has, until now, sought to delay any public gatherings out of a concern for your safety. As leaders of any church could tell you, we normally feel a heavy responsibility in caring for the souls of our congregants, but now, in light of this

virus, we also feel the responsibility of helping to care for your bodies as well. At least we don't want to recklessly put any of you in unnecessary danger.

Keeping that sense of responsibility in mind, after spending much time in conference and prayer, we as a session believe that we now have a viable plan in place that would allow us to safely return to in-person worship services in the next few weeks. Of course, we realize that not every Christian will agree with us that it is now safe to return to public worship, and we assure you that if you are in that camp, we will continue to record our services that you might continue to worship at home. On the other hand, we also expect that some will think that we are going too far in how we have chosen to carry out our particular plan for a safe return, but we do hope that you will respect our sincere desires for your wellbeing as well as our calling by God and this church to oversee this process in accordance with our own consciences and the collective wisdom that God has given to us to understand something of these trying times and to determine what we ought to do as a church.

With that being said, **we are calling for the church to regather for worship on Sunday, June 7th at 10:15 in the morning.** This first service will take place outside, Lord willing, on the lawn behind the church. We are asking that each participant bring his or her own chair or, perhaps, a blanket for young children. We will also provide metal folding chairs for those who do not have one or who may have left it at home by mistake. We will ensure that each individual or family unit is separated by at least six feet. Since we will be meeting outside, masks are not required, but you need to bring them in case we need to move indoors.

In case of inclement weather, we will seek to move the service into the sanctuary where the safety requirements will be much stricter. If we need to move into the building, we may have to limit the number of people who can enter to around 135, thus we may have to have two services to accommodate those wishing to participate. Also, we will require everyone to wear a mask at all times and to have their temperature checked prior to entering. If you feel sick, or have a fever, or a persistent cough, please stay home until you are better. Once again, every individual or family unit will be situated at least six feet away from all other worshippers and we will help direct you to the appropriate seats upon entrance and how to exit in a safe manner. We will also encourage people not to sing loudly during the service in order to hinder any potential carrier from spreading the virus unknowingly to those nearby. We will leave all the doors open throughout the service so that no one will need to touch any of the door handles, and we will limit access to certain portions of the building.

In both scenarios, no nursery will be provided, nor will any of the ordinary Sunday school classes take place. There will be no coffee fellowship, and no opportunity for physical greetings after the service. At all times we encourage you to refrain from all hugging, hand-shaking and any other embrace that brings you closer than the six feet allowed. We, as a session, realize that this is a very strict policy, which is why we are hoping to meet outside to allow us a little more freedom of movement, but if we do need to meet inside, we make no apology for these stringent measures. We truly have your best interest at heart and are seeking to protect our aging congregation from being the next breaking news story. We love you all, and we hope that you too will love your neighbor as yourself to help minimize any risk of exposure. We are praying that the Lord will bless this service and keep us all safe underneath his everlasting arms.

In Christ,

The Tyrone Covenant Session