

Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

I want to share a few updates with you today concerning our ministry as we begin the fall season. First of all, I want to remind you to be in prayer for our students, teachers, administrators as they anticipate returning to school. As you know, there are options for in-person and virtual learning being offered in the Greater Nashville Area and in Williamson County. Also, many of our college students find themselves in a rather tenuous position, with some returning to campus and others going online. And so, we want to lift them all in our prayers. We'll be sharing a special time of commissioning for our educators, students and families in our online worship this Sunday.

Secondly, we're kicking off a year-long series in worship this weekend called "Walking with Jesus." After spending an entire year in the wisdom section of the Scriptures, we're going to dedicate the next 48 weeks to a deep study of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke), as we seek to be more intentional and purposeful in our discipleship. On August 9, we are beginning the first segment of our focus called "Teach Us to Pray." During this year, we will be emphasizing the prayer life of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the prophecy of Jesus, the preaching of Jesus, the passion of Jesus and the people of Jesus. These 6 sections will take us through June 2021.

This Sunday, we will also be featuring a video introducing The Journey, a discipleship tool that will help each of us to understand the ways we can continue to grow in our relationship to Christ and in service to others.

Thirdly, we want you to know that on Sunday, August 16 we will be beginning in-person worship. We will have limited seating structured for proper physical distancing. The services will continue to take place at 8:30 and 11 a.m. This will give our facilities team proper time to disinfect the sanctuary between services. The 8:30 service will continue to be led by praise band and ensembles. The 11 service will continue to be led by Chancel Choir ensembles.

Here's the way the registration process will work. On Mondays, prior to the next Sunday, you may register on our website for the service of your choice. You will receive a confirmation of your request at that time.

Then on Saturday afternoon, you will receive your designated seat location. You will also receive a designated time to arrive at the church, at which time you will go through screening and check-in. We will require the wearing of masks on campus for everyone age 2 and older, including during worship, in order to maximize our care for one another. We are grateful for our trained volunteers who will be assisting us in these precautions and protocols.

There will be no nursery, children and student programs, or adult in-person programming on Sunday mornings for the time being; just worship.

We will also continue our livestreaming of services on Sunday for those who are vulnerable among us, and for those who choose to continue worshipping

at home. Our survey showed that more than 50% of you would prefer to worship from home until there is a vaccine. We understand that, and we will continue to provide on-line worship and other opportunities.

We know that in-person worship will be a little different from what we've been accustomed to because of our precautions. But we believe with these measures in place we are doing our very best to assure your safety. We will not have hymnals, bulletins, offering plates, passing of the peace, or large choirs. But we believe that for many of you, just being back in the space and in community will be meaningful. Those of you who join us in-person will be a part of the witness of the Gospel beyond the walls, as we will have many more worshipping on-line than in-person.

With that said, I want you to know that we are also expanding our production team to include additional staffing and equipment, so that we can continue with excellence our streaming witness. It is our hope that as we expand in the days ahead, we will be able to stream weddings, funerals and special services. We are indebted to Jeff Wood, who has accepted this task of managing our overall production work as it relates to worship and spiritual formation. This will require his efforts full-time, and for this reason we will be adding to our modern worship team as well. Mason Caviness will be helping to lead our praise band beginning in September.

There are several more things on the horizon. We anticipate beginning an in-person contemplative prayer service in the Sanctuary on Wednesday mornings at 11 a.m. beginning on September 2.

We will be hosting Refuel virtually with a focus on strengthening our prayer life, beginning Wednesday evenings on September 16.

Finally, we anticipate starting Saturday night worship on September 26. We will offer that service in the sanctuary to allow for greater seating than our chapel allows (with physical distancing and safety protocols).

After Labor Day, we hope to begin allowing small groups by request to use classrooms during the week. We will have limited numbers based on square footage of rooms with safety procedures in place.

We do ask that Sunday School classes continue this fall to meet online, due to the large numbers in the majority of our classes.

Children and youth ministry will want to stay tuned to age-level opportunities that will be offered both online and in-person in the days ahead.

I shared with the staff recently that for a time we're not going to be able to think bigger is better. We're going to consider that smaller is necessary. But I'm also aware of how effective Jesus is in smaller groups. He seemed to do a lot of ministry in groups of 3, 12, 70 and 120. Occasionally, he would feed

the multitudes, and teach the crowds. And we will continue to do that online. But much of the deep spiritual formation Jesus does is in smaller groups. We encourage you to be adaptive in this regard as well.

The mission of the church is very strong. Your generosity has been exemplary in numerous ways. This summer we were able to continue our partnership with Project Transformation, Harvest Hands, and Nashville Freedom Schools as they transitioned their summer programs to virtual settings. You as a church body also collected supplies to fill 300 backpacks for students in Williamson and Davidson Counties through our Build a Backpack initiative.

On Monday, August 10, you will have opportunity to register for in-person worship. I remind you again that there will be limited seating. Your patience is important as we begin this process.

Please also trust that we are making these decisions with the best possible information available. I'm aware that different people see things differently, based on your specific situation. Opinions run the gamut. And please understand that some of what I share today could change tomorrow, depending on the virus. But know that in all that we do as the body of Christ, some things do not change with crises and pandemics. God is with us, and His providential love and mercy is our strength. We will continue to be faithful to God as He leads us into the days ahead. I am grateful for you all.