

Dear Grace family,

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul expresses his longing to be with the Roman believers saying, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” (Rom. 1:11-12) These words from Paul express the longing we feel as elders, eagerly awaiting the day when we can again gather for worship and to “Let the amen sound from his people again.”¹

The session is making plans for us to begin meeting in person again, starting on Sunday, July 12th. In what follows, you will find a detailed explanation of our plans to re-gather and how that will gradually phase back to a new “normal.”

We know that some of you may have been ready for this for weeks and feel that this is long overdue. At the same time, we are aware that others will find this to be pre-mature. Similarly, some will find this phased plan to be too stringent, while others may find it to be too lax. The session is seeking to find the most appropriate way for us to gather again for worship, while also doing all we can to ensure safety. We are well aware that our trust is in the Lord, who has not called us to live in fear – but as those who will give an account for your souls, we also take seriously Scripture’s teaching to count the cost of all we do and to take appropriate precautions (Heb. 13:17, Rm. 8:15, Lk. 14:25ff, Prov. 22:3).

While we are always called to bear with one another (Col. 3:13), this is a season where that reminder is especially appropriate. Let us commit now to extending an extra measure of grace to those who think differently from us. And let us commit to loving one another as ourselves, being willing to forego our own rights and prerogatives for the sake of protecting our brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 8).

We want to prepare you for the fact that it may be a while before things are “back to normal.” While we are preparing to re-gather, it will look and feel very different from what we all remember. The fellowship, order of worship, and various other things will still be different for some time. We trust that, in the Lord’s timing, he will allow us to establish a new sense of normalcy, but until then we will proceed with various restrictions in place.

Finally, if you are not comfortable attending yet, please do not feel pressure to attend. Indeed, for many (if you are considered high-risk) we would encourage you not to attend. We plan to continue to stream our services so that those who are unable to attend are still able to be included. We don’t want anyone to feel guilty into coming when you believe it would be unwise to do so.

In Christ,

The GRPC Session

¹ From the hymn, *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*, translated by Catherine Winkworth.

Overview of Phased Re-gathering Plan

*Please note that due to the changing climate and understanding of the coronavirus, this chart is subject to change.

All Phases include Indoor Worship	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	New "Normal"
Distancing Requirements	6' distance strictly enforced. No physical contact.	6' distance moderately enforced. Physical contact discouraged.	6' distance not enforced. Minimal physical contact.	Wisdom and discretion.
High Risk People	Encouraged to stay at home.	Encouraged to stay at home.	Discretion with social distancing encouraged.	Wisdom and discretion.
Children	Encouraged to stay at home.	Encouraged to stay at home.	Wisdom and discretion.	Wisdom and discretion.
Masks	Required	Strongly Encouraged	Wisdom and discretion.	Wisdom and discretion.
Group Size	20-30 people in sanctuary.	50 people max.	No Limit.	No Limit.
Cleaning	Sanitizer available on entry.	Sanitizer available on entry.	Sanitizer available on entry.	Sanitizer available on entry.
Sunday School (Adults/Youth)	No Sunday School	No in-person Sunday School	Resumed in person	Resumed in person
Children's ministries (Sun. School/Children's Church)	No Children's ministry activities	No Children's ministry activities	Resumed in person	Resumed in person
Other Church Ministries and events	Online only	Online only	Option to resume in person	Resumed in person
Livestream	Available	Available	Available	Available

Phase 1 - Begins July 12, 2020

Phase 1 will be the first step in our re-gathering plan. We do not currently have a timeframe for how long each phase will last before moving to the next phase. However, our hope and plan is to begin phase 1 on Sunday, July 12, 2020. Here are some of the details that you will need to know for this phase:

What social distancing requirements will be in place? - In this phase, we will enforce strict social distancing of 6 feet between people of different households. Families who live in the same home together may sit together, but must be at least 6 feet away from others. This distancing requirement means that there can be no physical contact. We are all eager to give one another hugs, but for now a wave will have to do. In light of this, there are a few other restrictions that will be in place:

- **Entering and Exiting:** The side door will be closed, so that all enter in through the front door into the Narthex. Upon entering, you will be immediately directed to your seat, filling the sanctuary from the front to the back. In addition to this, we ask that everyone exit the building immediately after the service, so that any fellowship takes place outside. We will exit starting with the back rows first.
- **Cleaning:** Hand sanitizer will be available in the Narthex upon entry. We ask everyone to adhere to best personal hygiene practices. The sanctuary will be cleaned as usual. Since we only have one worship service, our standard cleaning will be sufficient to ensure that the sanctuary is safe and clean by the following Sunday.
- **Food and Drinks:** No food or drinks (including coffee and tea) of any kind will be served.
- **Masks:** Masks will be required for all who enter the building. Please bring a mask with you, though we will have some available if anyone forgets. We believe that wearing a mask is an important way to love our neighbors as ourselves. We don't wear masks to protect ourselves, but to protect others from us, since it is possible to be contagious for many days even if we have no symptoms.
- **Restrooms:** The upstairs restrooms will be available for use. Please thoroughly wash your hands before exiting.
- **Sickness:** If you or anyone in your household are feeling sick or ill (or if you have been exposed to someone with COVID related symptoms within the past 2 weeks), please stay home. Please monitor your temperature before coming.

Can I just show up? - Unfortunately, no. Due to the small size of our sanctuary, we are severely limited in the number of people we can have in the sanctuary at one time. The limit will be approximately 20-30 people. In order to sign up, please use the following form: <https://mygrpcmd.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/15/responses/new>. In Addition to this space restriction, please note the following considerations:

- **High Risk:** If you are considered high risk, whether from age or a health condition, we *strongly encourage* you to stay at home. It grieves us to have to say this, but we believe it is necessary for the sake of safety. We will have a livestream available, so that any who are not able to attend will still be able to participate from home.

- **Young Children:** We will not be having any children's ministry programs during this first phase. We do not want to require volunteers to show up and serve if they are not comfortable, but we also know that it is nearly impossible for young children to practice social distancing. We love our children and value their presence in our worship service, but due to the need for strict social distancing, we *strongly encourage* those with young children to keep them at home and participate via the livestream for the time being.
- **Visitors:** While we plan to use a sign-up form to ensure that we do not have too many people in the building, it is also possible that we may have visitors come. We want to be welcoming and hospitable to visitors who may come through our doors. In light of this - even if you have signed up - please be willing to give up your seat if a visitor shows up.

Will there be anything besides worship? - During this phase, we are only planning to resume our worship service. There will be no Sunday School in person, no Children's Church, and no other in-person church activities have been resumed. We will continue to have a children's moment before the service begins, and other ministries may continue online at this time.

What other changes can I expect? - There will be changes to our order of worship. This will include some of the following:

- **No printed materials:** In order to minimize the risk of having several people touch the same surface, there will be no bulletins, Bibles, or hymnals in the sanctuary. The order of worship and all the songs will be displayed on the projector screen. Please plan to bring your own Bible so that you can follow along as we read God's word!
- **Fewer songs:** Because singing has been shown to be one of the most effective ways of spreading the virus, we will be limiting the number of songs that we sing during the service. We believe that we are commanded to sing as part of the worship of God (Col. 3:16), but we feel that fewer songs can minimize some of the risk. We will likely have one song to open the service, one song sometime in the middle of the service, and one song after the sermon. Additionally, since we will all be wearing masks, and since there will be fewer people singing, we will attempt to have a simpler approach to our music ministry in this phase. Likely, this will mean that we do not have a full worship band, but only a few people to help lead us in singing.
- **No Offering:** There will be no offering taken during the service in order to avoid touching common surfaces. We encourage everyone to continue giving online, or by mailing checks to the church. For those who prefer to give in person, there will be an offering plate in the narthex, where you may leave an offering on your way in or out of the building.
- **Communion:** Many are encouraging churches to withhold partaking of the Lord's Supper during this time, due to the potential risks associated with it. The session is exploring options for the Lord's Supper that will minimize risk (i.e. pre-packaged elements), but the greater challenge for the Lord's Supper is that the whole body is not able to gather at this time. Those who are watching on the livestream are not present and would not be able to partake in the Lord's Supper, and since we are actively encouraging many of you to remain home, we will not be having the Lord's Supper during this first phase. We eagerly hope to partake together as soon as possible!

- **Livestream:** Many of you have expressed the desire to have some form of streamed service available for those who are not able to attend in person. We share the same concern and have decided that the livestream will continue as an option when we are back in person. As we have discussed options, it seems that Facebook Live is better suited for this type of streaming. Once we are back in person, we will shift from Zoom to Facebook Live. All the details will be made available, but the stream will be found on the [GRPC Facebook page](#).