



Dear West Siders,

We have had some people begin to ask questions about the opportunity to open up again. Let me lay out some key dates and announcements that impact how West Side is seeking to respond to this crisis.

- **March 13:** Governor Inslee announces ban on gatherings of 250 people.
- **March 15:** All worship gatherings moved to our Online platform (Facebook and www.westsidechurchrichland.org) at 9:45 am
- **March 23:** Governor Inslee issues stay-at-home order
- **March 23:** A small group of elders, healthcare professionals, and staff meet to make recommendations for Session.
- **March 24:** Session decides to close Church building to all groups. Employees and Bite2Go will continue to have access but will begin practicing social-distancing measures and precautions. The Session decision included that Session would be responsible for deciding when to reopen based on state guidelines and with advisement from healthcare professionals from our Church family.
- **April: Growing together and encouraging one another through various technology.**
 - Daily mediations by pastoral staff (Monday through Saturday)
 - Hope in Desperate Times: a Bible Study on the Book of Revelation (Monday and Wednesday)
 - Sunday School Video (weekly)
 - Deacons calling members of parishes
 - Lecture Series: The Cruciform Way: Leadership and Humility (Thursday)
 - Zoom meetings (Session, Deacons, Committees, CFM, and Life Groups)
 - Worship Nights (Wednesday)
- **May 4:** Governor Inslee issues a Phased approach to Recovery.
 - All church activities are limited to Phase 3 and Phase 4
 - Gatherings of Worship would limited to Phase 4
 - Moving from Phase 1 to Phase 2 requires less than 10 cases per 100,000 people in a county in a rolling 14 day period.
- **May 22:** President Trump makes statement that Churches are essential and told states they should let churches open. Technically, he did not give an executive order and the CDC continues to instruct churches to follow state guidelines.
- **May 26:** Session discusses reopening. A Task Force consisting of 6 elders, 2 staff, and 3 Healthcare professionals are asked to prepare a Reopening plan based on Washington State's phased approach of reopening.
- **May 27:** Governor Inslee announces new guidelines for reopening, affirming that worship is essential but cautioning against the increased risk that in-person services pose for contracting COVID-19.
 - If possible, spiritual worship should continue to be done remotely.
 - Phase 1: Outdoor services on the organization's property with up to 100 people excluding organizational staff.
 - Phase 2: Hold indoor services at place of worship up to 50 individuals. Hold or provide in-home services or counseling inside a person's residence with up to 5 individuals excluding organizational staff.
- **Benton and Franklin County** will not be moving to Phase 2, because we have exceeded the necessary threshold of new cases in a rolling 14 day period.
- **May 31:** First meeting of the COVID-19 Reopening Task Force.
- **June 10:** Present to Session initial draft of Reopening Plan.
- **June 13 or 14:** Share Reopening Plan with the Congregation.

It is also important to share that as Christians we appreciate the affirmation of the essential nature of worship, our top concern at this time is seeking the welfare of our church family and community. When we are able to hold in-person worship does not necessarily mean we will. We want to ensure a safe plan for gathering for worship. There are a number of stories of churches reopening and gathering for worship and then a high number of people becoming infected. Gathering for longer periods of time in confined spaces seems to increase the risk factor. Second, singing creates a larger radius of possible infection from 6 feet to 12 feet. All this happens in our worship space. We also hold multiple services which increases the number of people in the same space in a period where COVID-19 can possibly be transferred through surface to surface contact.

While we look forward to worshipping together in person, we know that for many in our church family, you are in a high risk category and should not come when we begin to reopen. We are seeking to put a lot of effort into leading services through the online experience that draw us together and glorify God. For many, this may be the best way to engage in our large gathering worship events until a vaccine is available or we reach later stages.

One question has been whether we will continue with the online format after we reopen. We are actually very thankful that we had started the online option for more than a year before COVID-19 hit us. We will continue to offer this as a way for people to participate in our worship when this is all finally over.



Thank you for all the support and encouragement. Continue to pray.

Blessings in Christ,
Pastor Ralph