

## **MOVING FORWARD WITH A NEW 'NORMAL' MINISTRY RE-ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

Greetings from First Baptist Church of Johnson City. In light of various sections of the country moving toward reopening the economy and “normal” activities, there has been a lot of prayer and consideration on the part of the leadership in developing a three-stage plan for re-engaging in ministry when circumstances allow for it. Preparations are underway even now, as the building has gone through a thorough cleaning, ministry staff is preparing for fall ministries, and a **Ministry Re-Engagement Plan** is in place as we prepare for a new normal.

Today, I would like to share the three-stage Ministry Re-Engagement Plan with the caveat that adjustments may be made in light of circumstances still unknown to us. Our plan is built upon a number of considerations that are important as we move forward:

- 1) The safety and well-being of all of our members, particularly those who are at greater risk.
- 2) The adherence to strict physical distancing protocols throughout our ministry, including face masks (in accordance to the COVID-19 Task Force recommendations).
- 3) The intentional, purposeful, and gradual re-engagement of ministry opportunities and events based on biblical principles.
- 4) The clear communication of each stage of the plan to address congregational concerns, fears and uncertainties.
- 5) The primary focus of decision-making based upon what is best for the congregation as a whole, not upon individual desires or other local church ministries.

While there is not a specific date available today for when houses of worship can reconvene in large groups, we want to be fully prepared for the time when that becomes reality. At that time, **The First Stage of our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan** will begin. The duration of each stage will be four weeks and during this first month our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan will be limited to a Family Worship Service at 9:30 AM on Sunday mornings. If need be, based upon strict physical distancing protocols including limitations on large gatherings, there is a plan for an additional worship service allowing for everyone who desires to be engaged together in worship. Consideration will be given for the Nursery and Jumpers ministry based upon the availability of qualified ministry workers. Children from Pre-school to sixth grade will gather with their families in the Worship Center and the service will include a children’s lesson/message from our children’s ministry director. In addition, children from Pre-school to third grade will receive an activity folder each week as they enter the Worship Center.

In the first-stage of our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan, there will be no coffee or beverage ministry, no printed bulletins, and offering receptacles will be placed at the entrances into the Worship Center to prevent the passing of any form of contamination. In addition, limited seating will be available in the Worship Center and we ask that each person in attendance comply. Families living in the same household can sit together, but all others must be seated at least six feet apart from each other. Any other additional ministry options during these four

weeks will be available only on our social media platforms (devotionals, announcements, prayer requests, etc.). For those who are at risk or those who are uncomfortable meeting together as soon as we are able to re-engage in ministry, the live streaming of the worship service will continue to be available.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is instructed to be observed when God's people come together, not virtually, but physically gathered in the local church (I Corinthians 11:17-34, particularly verses 17, 18, 20). At First Baptist, the celebration of the Lord's Supper will follow our morning worship once a month and will not be live streamed. The leadership is aware that other ministries are handling this differently, but I wish to remind you that our primary focus of decision-making is based upon what is best for our congregation as a whole and determined by what we believe the Bible teaches, and we ask for your understanding in this matter.

**The Second Stage of our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan** involves the next four weeks of planned ministry events. During this stage, our continued emphasis will be on family worship and the launching of additional select ministry options. These ministries will operate under the same social distancing requirements outlined in Stage One of the Plan and detailed in the email you received. All added ministry options will operate under a 60% capacity guideline, meaning all ministries will have to make adjustments in their respective meeting places to conform. This may involve moving classrooms, limiting the number of those attending, and the availability of qualified ministry workers.

In this second month, First Baptist Church will launch an adjusted Adult Bible Fellowship and Sunday School option. In addition, I will complete our study on the inerrancy of Scripture during these four weeks in the Worship Center, which will help relieve overcrowding of classrooms and allow our ABF classes to reengage under the 60% capacity guideline. The Children's Ministry Team will make adjustments for our Children's Ministry, as well as offer consideration for the launching of a limited and abbreviated Kids Own Worship program during the First Baptist Church morning worship hour. It is important to know at each stage that the re-engagement of all ministries outside of our morning worship will be based upon the availability of qualified ministry workers. If there is not an adequate number of ministry workers, we will delay the launch of these ministries to the Third Stage of our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan.

During this second stage, the leadership will also prayerfully consider all ministry initiatives and offerings, making necessary adjustments based on our evaluations, adhering to biblical principles while focusing upon what is best for the congregation as a whole. Inevitably, this may lead to questioning, challenging, and even murmuring about the future of our ministry. As the leadership team negotiates this "new normal," there will be an opportunity for church members to provide feedback and ask questions, allowing the leadership to make adjustments along the way when necessary. It is important to note that any ministry adjustments will take place after the completion of the three-stage Ministry Re-Engagement Plan, at a time when we are finally able to launch our fall ministry programming with minimal restrictions.

Finally, in **The Third stage of our Ministry Re-Engagement Plan**, we will continue to do ministry based upon the first and second stages and commence planning for all fall ministries. This will include planning the launch of all adult, youth and children's fall ministry opportunities

while taking into consideration the conclusions of the ministry evaluation process by the leadership. There is still so much that we do not know about the future, the timing of the launch of our three-stage Ministry Re-Engagement Plan, or the resources that will be available to us in this “new normal.” I believe with all of my heart that God knows, and He will give us clear direction and unity as we move forward in these difficult and trying times.

Unfortunately, during the outlined three-month period, there will be no large wedding receptions, funeral dinners, class dinners or any other large gatherings at First Baptist other than those already identified, in order to do our best to maintain the safety and well-being of all of our members, particularly those who are at greater risk. Equally, it is to adhere to the strict physical distancing protocol recommendations (in accordance to the COVID-19 Task Force recommendations), and what is best for the congregation as a whole, not upon our individual desires or other ministries.

Overall, I want to remind you of the weighty burden placed upon the leadership in all of our considerations in the Ministry Re-Engagement Plan. I also want to assure you that the plan in place fulfills our biblical responsibility as a local church, primarily as a gathered local church coming together for worship, singing praises to our God, sitting under the teaching of His Word, celebrating the ordinances, and focusing upon the family. This includes a focus on the congregation as a family of believers and your family as well. We must seize this opportunity presented to us, using it to model for our children a living faith, displaying a unity in the faith, exhibiting a humble cooperative spirit, and reflecting our utter dependence on our God and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:3-8).

If we have learned anything in this Covid-19 Pandemic, we’ve learned that we cannot take anything for granted. If by some chance we are unable to meet again at a future time, our desire is to prepare your family to continue in worship, the teaching of the Word of God, fulfilling your duties as husband and wife, mother and father, as you raise your children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 5:15-6:4). Acknowledging, “The surpassing power belongs to God and not to us,” and whatever might happen in the future, we will “not lose heart” even though we may be tested in ways that make us very uncomfortable. We will consider all the challenges of the day, “light and momentary affliction,” that is “preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (II Corinthians 4:7-18). Looking to things that are eternal, may you be surprised by hope, surprised by silence, surprised by joy, surprised by thanksgiving, and surprised by the peace of God that sustains us at all times, in every way and is found in Christ alone! (Romans 5:1, Philippians 4:4-9).

May God alone be glorified at First Baptist Church in Johnson City as we move forward in this “new normal” that God has ordained for such a time as this. May the peace of God be with you and I hope to see you soon!