



**Worship & Administration:**  
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Friday | July 17, 2020

Hello Church Family,

I hope this open letter finds you healthy and doing well even in the midst of our circumstances. I have been struggling a little on what to do with our re-entry plans and execution. Instead of shooting another video, I thought this open letter to everyone would be more effective. I apologize for its length – but you know I'm not the shortest preacher around!

We have worked quite diligently to provide an atmosphere for everyone including our staff and volunteers wearing face coverings as they serve the congregation. What we have seen over the first 5 weekends of public worship is a small crowd (14-18) at our mask required services and very manageable crowds (65-85) at our mask encouraged services.

Our staff continues to produce online worship services by pre-recording every element and editing them into a good quality experience for those who cannot join us in the building. Those numbers continue to hover around 55-65 viewing families each Sunday. We also recognize many could be watching the services at times other than Sunday morning due to conflicts and convenience. All of this still leaves us in the dark with who is attending and who is not which is an important part of caring for our congregation.

All of this takes me back to asking, **"Why do we gather?"** Here are my reflections:

- We gather for each other – to find genuine relationship with others.
- The church is not simply the center for "information distribution." You can get Bible teaching and information anywhere and at any time.
- We gather to be equipped and encouraged to do the work of ministry in our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods. This is accomplished in small groups that meet together and gather in relationship.
- The church does not gather just so we can hear good music or another sermon. We know this can happen online. The church gathers to be in relationship.

I had one friend mention to me last Sunday that they nearly did not attend worship. They concluded they could get everything they needed online. But they did come and within minutes were brought to tears just being in the presence of God with others. There is something special about being together that is not completely reproducible online.

**So the question becomes not "if" we gather, but rather, "how" should we gather.** Face coverings? Singing? Enforcement? The reality is that many have strong opinions on these questions on both sides. Many others are willing to do whatever they are asked to do by our leadership. Governor Whitmer's Executive Order from July 10 does require us to wear face coverings in public places unless we have a medical exemption. It also clearly exempts churches to enforce this, while still strongly encouraging attendees to wear masks.

Maybe the question we should be asking in the church is this: **What would Jesus tell us to do?** After all, he came to Earth during a time that Israel was not truly Israel. It was a country under Roman authority. Yet, Jesus never spoke out against Rome even though at that time it was a pagan culture who worshipped many different gods. Instead, Jesus spoke harshly toward the religious corruption that was leading the people of God further from true faith.

Repeatedly Jesus taught and demonstrated that true religion was found in taking care of the lowly, the weak, the marginalized, the exposed, the poor, and the sick. He told his followers to not only love their neighbor but to also

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*"We desire to experience the transforming love of God and share it with others!"*

pray for their enemy. This was radical thinking and it honestly frustrated many who believed the Messiah would be a political figure who would liberate their people from the tyranny of Rome (like Moses from Egypt or David from the Philistines).

I believe that Jesus' call for love and prayer are the key ingredients in living our lives during these turbulent times. How can we love our neighbor while constantly speaking a message that attacks their personal convictions? How can we pray for our enemy while working overtime to prove their convictions are wrong and will lead to destruction? There is plenty of evidence that face coverings in many environments will provide a level of protection. There is also plenty of evidence that face coverings are not necessary in other environments.

What seems to be fueling much of both narratives is fear. Fear that if everyone doesn't wear a mask that numbers will spike, deaths will spin out of control, and none of this will go away. Fear that if everyone does wear a mask that it will signal the end of our civil liberties and freedoms that we value in America. One thing that is certain: fear is driving a massive wedge between friends and family and even within the walls of the church. Fear is not our answer!

In his first recorded sermon, Jesus responds to false teachings that were creating a breeding ground for fear. It's recorded by Matthew in chapter 5. It's nature for humans to respond to evil with even greater evil. Jesus says this has no place in those who follow the Lord. If you are slapped (which was a huge insult in their culture) offer the other cheek instead of fighting back. If you are sued for something as small as your shirt, be willing to recognize their need and offer them more. Finally, if anyone forces you to carry their gear for one mile (which was a Roman Law allowing soldiers to force citizens to assist them in carrying their equipment) we shouldn't stop at the bear minimum but go twice as far as expected.

**How can we turn the other cheek, offer more than expected, and go the extra mile?** Answering this seems to be the key to understanding how to walk as Jesus walked, love like Jesus loved, and live as Jesus lived.

For me personally, this means:

- I wear a face covering and remain as physically distant as possible when I'm around others in public.
- I go out of my way to show kindness, patience, and care for strangers and friends.
- I also will stretch those guidelines when necessary to demonstrate love and care for those who are hurting and needing personal touch.
- I wash and sanitize my hands frequently not because I'm afraid – but to offer protection for others.

If Jesus told his followers to honor a pagan Roman government – then I will honor mine. If they disrupt my life – so be it. One thing they can't disrupt is my personal journey with the Lord and the relationship I embrace with Him. There is nothing more important in our lifetime than this! **If nothing else, we should all declare this to be a season where we draw closer to God, seek HIM more, and find our PEACE in His presence!**

So ... what does this mean about our worship gatherings at Flushing Community Church? I told everyone at the beginning of this re-opening process that we would adjust as needed. So, here are my recommendations moving forward:

- 1) We will continue to offer the opportunity to gather in the building and online.
- 2) We are asking that everyone who attends our worship gatherings wear a face covering at least until they find their seat.
- 3) We are going to assume that if you are not wearing a covering, that you have a legitimate reason for doing so as outlined by the Michigan CDC.
- 4) If you can tolerate wearing your covering while singing, we encourage you to do so. If you find this restrictive, then we ask you to be aware of others around you. Do not allow the mask to be a hindrance in your worship of the Lord.
- 5) Face Coverings should remain on throughout the 9AM worship service but may be removed at your seat at the 11AM worship service. However, please place your mask back on as you enter, exit or have any conversations in the building.
- 6) Kid City Ministries will remain open for families according to the guidelines previously promoted. We believe

these guidelines are in alignment with current CDC guidelines for daycares and schools.

Now, if this isn't safe enough for your convictions, I ask that you extend grace and go the extra mile by worshipping online and engage with our congregation in the public chat and reaching out to our staff. Being online is wonderful but we need to find new ways to help your family engage with others during this experience.

If this is too restrictive for you, I ask that you would extend grace and go the extra mile by either complying with our recommendations or join us online and engage with us there! Allowing frustration over these recommendations could only have a negative impact on you. Can we choose to see the positives? I know we can!

**I say all of this will love and trust in my heart that you know I only desire the best for you and for our church!**

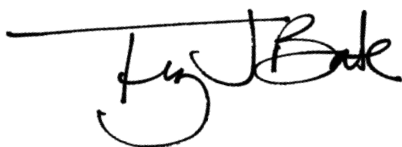
Our leadership recognizes the delicate position we are ALL in and we desire to see our mission move forward in these days! We believe this can happen, but unity in the Body of Christ is essential in that process!

To this end, **I am asking each of us to be in constant prayer for the church!** Can you put a reminder in your home, office or car to pray for your church each and every day? Will you make it a goal to lift up your own heart and it's response to the crazy things going on around us? Will you pray for your friends and family and don't leave out those who drive you nuts or you consider an "enemy"? **If there has ever been a time - today is it!** *We need to genuinely seek God's face and trust in His leadership in our lives!*

I truly hope that you will be with us on Sunday and experience the joy of being together. It really is a special experience to gather and we believe we can do so safely. I am encouraged each time I can see you in the crowd and share a brief conversation from a safe distance. **More than this, I desire to experience the power of God's Spirit as He visits with us no matter where we are!** I know that God is working through our online services and we are honored to continue to offer them for you!

Thank you for praying for our staff as we learn and explore new ways to help our faith community grow and engage with one another. We are in uncharted waters and are doing our best to balance all the issues of our day. Thanks for your love, support and prayers as we do this together!

You Are Loved!!



Terry Bate | Lead Pastor

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." (Matthew 5:38-44 NLT)