

10 June 2020

Church Family,

We are thrilled that we can meet together this week to worship God and enjoy a foretaste of eternity! There will be two one-hour services this Sunday at 9:00 and 11:00 am.

The key word for this week's gatherings is "grace." There will be hiccups and details that need to be ironed out. Inevitably, certain elements won't run smoothly. Some people might feel our safety measures aren't strict enough, others may feel they are too strict. After we get through this weekend, we'll likely need to make some changes or adjustments. We have a lot to learn. So let's all work to extend grace to one another as we awkwardly attempt to worship together in this post-COVID world.

That said, I want to do my best to calibrate expectations correctly. I ask that everyone read this note carefully so that we can all be on the same page.

For those who cannot attend

First, a word to those who cannot attend. This includes anyone who is symptomatic. It also includes those who elect to stay home because they are vulnerable, work with a vulnerable sector, live with someone who is vulnerable, have a conscience objection to meeting, or don't feel the church environment is right for their current situation. You are a treasured part of our church family. Please don't feel pressured into attending. To make sure you feel included, we will livestream both the 9:00 and 11:00 am services. We will also continue to offer our on-line Bible Class and Children's Church, as well the Thursday night Community Sermon Chat.

The Basic Plan for Sunday

We will host two identical, one-hour services at 9:00 and 11:00 am. There will be no nursery or children's church, so we'll have the joy and excitement (and noise 😊) of kids of all ages in our service. To accommodate that, our service will be abbreviated. There will be three songs, a shorter prayer time, and a shortened sermon.

We ask that you arrive between 15 minutes and 5 minutes prior to the service start time. The only entrance will be the front entrance. We expect a bit of a lineup, so please form a physically-distanced line in the direction of the church sign. Greeters will be there to keep the door open for you, offer you sanitizer, and provide reminders or instructions. Someone with a clipboard will take your name (this will only be used for communication if someone in attendance was later found out to have had COVID). One important note: we ask that those with mobility issues, underlying health concerns, or our elderly be dropped off at the front door and not wait in line – we want to do all we can to serve you!

Upon entry, please proceed directly into the auditorium (or gym, if overflow is needed). Alternating pews will be closed. If able, please move to the center of an open pew, sitting as household units and spaced at least two meters away from those not in your household. If

you need guidance, an usher will be happy to help you. We have instructed our ushers to request compliance if someone is not physically distanced (they aren't trying to be rude – just trying to make sure we follow protocol as we meet).

During the service, there will be a time of congregational singing. Research suggests that singing makes someone far more contagious than typical speech. Because of that, we ask that anyone who plans on singing wear a mask while singing. If you do not have a mask, extras will be available as you enter the building. Please review proper mask usage prior to attending.

When the service concludes, ushers will dismiss the congregation by row. You will exit immediately through the same front entrance. If you'd like to talk further (which we'd encourage!), please do so outdoors while maintaining physical distancing. We ask that those who attend the 9:00 am service leave the parking lot by 10:30 am to make room for the next service.

Rationale

Why two services?

The Province allows 30% of building capacity. For us, that means approximately 120 in our auditorium and an additional 75 in an overflow in our gym (total: 195). With over 300 in regular attendance, we wanted to make sure we didn't have to turn anyone away. Further, having a less-crowded room is safer. We anticipate the second service being more crowded, so if you are unsure which service you'll attend, we'd encourage you toward the 9:00 am service.

Why a one-hour service?

There are three reasons for the shortened service. The first, which I already mentioned, is that we want to make the service as family-friendly as possible. The shortened time-frame will help with this. Second, the less time we are all exposed to the same air, the lower the chances of contagion. Third, because we need to sanitize the building between services, we need ample turnaround time between the services.

What steps are you taking to ensure the building is safe?

In addition to the steps already outlined in this note, we are sanitizing the pews, washrooms, and all touched surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, light switches) prior to both services.

We ask each person attending to take personal responsibility. This means staying home:

- If you have COVID symptoms (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>),
- If you've been exposed to someone who is symptomatic, or
- If you have traveled outside the province in the last 14 days.

We also ask that you wash your hands, cough or sneeze into your elbow, and practice physical distancing. No hugs, handshakes, etc. You are responsible for making sure your children follow these guidelines, too. For those who may feel this is too strict, thank you for showing grace in still following the guidelines.

What about my kids?

At Maple Avenue, we have always believed it's good to have kids in our service. In fact, we think it's *good* for them to grow up in "real church" seeing what believers of all ages do each Sunday. Plus, we want our services sounding more like a family reunion and less like a concert hall. Nonetheless, some parents might be intimidated about bringing your kids to church. We've done a few things to help with that:

- We are providing colouring sheets and sermon note sheets for your children (bring your own crayons).
- We have adjusted the service to make it more kid-friendly. Parts that would be harder for kids (e.g. the sermon, prayer) have been reduced to better serve our kids.
- For those who feel particularly self-conscious about a noisy or wiggly child, we have marked out some "family landing zones" in the foyer. Pull some of the nearby chairs into your circle (an usher can assist you) and benefit from a bit more space. This will allow you and members of your family to engage with the service in the less conspicuous setting of the foyer.

Another possibility is that one parent could attend the first service and the other attend the second. Or, simply worship from home by watching the livestream.

We look forward to the time when we can reopen our nursery and Children's Church. Until then, thank you for your grace.

Other Details

A few other helpful notes:

- All ushers and greeters will be wearing red "MABC Staff" shirts. If you are confused, ask someone in red.
- We will not collect an offering. Instead, an offering box will be available as you exit the church. You can also continue to give through our electronic options.
- We have removed all the "shared items" (e.g. hymnals, Bibles) from the pews. If you do not have a Bible you can bring, a gloved usher will hand you a sanitized Bible just prior to the sermon.
- Washrooms will be limited to two people at a time. Before and after the service, a washroom attendant will be on hand to direct traffic.
- Church mail slots will remain closed for the time being.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us at mabc@mabc.ca.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this carefully. But let's not get lost in all these rules, guidelines and new routines. The eternal people of God get to meet again! I cannot wait!

With love,

James Seward