

## CRC - The Reopening Journey

As we navigate these unprecedented times, there is no shortage of information. Every pastor, every denomination, and every ministry organization have advice on how we should think and what we should do. We, as both staff and consistory, think it is safe to say that the deluge of information has actually made it *more difficult* to discern the right steps to take. Despite this deluge of information, we feel as though a few things have become clear:

- **There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to this work.** Churches vary according to size, temperament, location, physical space, and many other characteristics.
- **The situation will continue to evolve.** As a society, we have yet to settle into a new rhythm and a settled rhythm may be a long way off. Things will continue to change as society reopens, the disease shifts, and human psychology evolves.

In our minds, both of these realities call for us to be really clear about who we are. If we are clear about who we are, we can chart a course without constantly comparing ourselves to other churches in our town or in our nation. Also, if we are clear about who we are, we can find our way through the ever-evolving situation.

With that in mind, we want us to articulate our **ministry priorities** and the **emerging core values** that will guide us through this time. We believe that if we can collectively *discern*, collectively *agree to*, and collectively *live out of* a set of priorities and values, we can uniquely thrive in the midst of an ever-evolving situation.

### **Emerging Core Values**

- **Humility** – in the midst of an unprecedented situation, none of us are experts, and we should be wary of too much certainty or confidence. Instead, this situation provides a great opportunity to model Christian humility in the spirit of Isaiah 55:8-9 and Philippians 2:5-11.
- **Patience** – regardless of when we meet together again in large groups, we are the church and God is God. Therefore, we can be patient. In a culture that has grown to value instant gratification, we can model counterculture patience. We don't have to rush anything as though our identity is at stake. We can be patient with a reopening process that is slower and more clunky than we'd prefer. We can live into Hebrews 10:25 in a multitude of other ways.
- **Flexibility** – flexibility for two reasons: (1) because none of us have ever done this before. We are having to rethink how we “do church” and we're making it up as we go. We have to be flexible and graceful in the face of new experiments. (2) because this thing could change rapidly as things evolve, and it could change in either direction: further opening or further closing. We need to be flexible as we experiment, learn, and adjust.
- **Grace** – we want to extend grace to one another as each person has a different view of what's safe and what ought to happen. We have an opportunity to live into 1 Corinthians 8:9 by making sure our sense of freedom is not a stumbling block for others. We need to

understand that different perspectives are legitimate and be careful not to judge others for the approach they feel they must take—an approach that is undoubtedly evolving.

- **Sacrifice** – in a culture that idolizes self, we have a tremendous opportunity to think and act on behalf of others. If Christ could carry a cross, we can certainly wash our hands more often and wear masks once in a while.
- **Unity** – we live in a hyper-partisan world. In the first few weeks of this new situation, it seemed like the pandemic might help bring us together. However, the last few weeks have proven otherwise. We have an opportunity to model something different—in the words of Paul, to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:1-3)

## Ministry Priorities

- **Relationship** – we are made in, through, and for relationships. This time has led to increased isolation. We want to foster relational connection as best we can, even if we cannot get together. Moreover, we want to foster relationship with God through various means
- **Discipleship** – Although our Sunday morning gathering is vital to our life together and we long for its return, we also know it serves a greater purpose: making more and better disciples of Jesus. We can still be doing many other things to serve that purpose. In fact, this is a great time to challenge any mental models wherein the church is a building.
- **Communication** – the whole body suffers if there’s a lack of communication. Even if we don’t know the path forward, we can communicate that ambivalence. Moreover, communication can help craft the narrative. We all tell ourselves stories about how things are unfolding. It’s important to tell gospel-centric, empowering stories.
- **Outreach** - this pandemic has provided the opportunity for us to see ourselves and at times to confess our tendency toward our own self-interests and self-preservation. This is a time in which God is calling us to serve others, to be sensitive to the needs of those around us and to act. "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do unto me." (Jesus)
- **And of course: God’s Word.** We want it proclaimed and taught in as many ways and places as possible. How can we exalt God’s Word at this time?

If we can articulate these things, it can not only provide vision for the congregation, but also guidance for the staff.

As we seek to find our way into the future via these priorities and values, the following plan is also emerging. A few initial comments before the specifics about the plan:

First, any plan will have to be flexible taking into account emerging research and spread of the virus. The plan may be adjusted by refinement of priorities & values.

Second, there seems to be general agreement that we need not rush to gather in large groups because ...

- (a) we are generally hesitant to begin inside worship under social distancing guidelines [ i.e., socially distanced worship is awkward, inconvenient, and not very much like worship.]
- (b) medical and health professions are generally in agreement that lengthy, large, indoor gatherings are risky and can encourage transmission of the virus.
- (c) based on the science, the governmental order prohibits large, in-person gatherings. There is a religious exemption, but given (a) and (b) and other factors, like providing a welcoming and safe environment, it seems unwise to gather inside in larger groups very quickly.

Third, given some of the emerging values and priorities, and given our large green space and parking lot, we should take advantage of gatherings and outdoor spaces.

## **Phased Reopening Plan Community Reformed Church**

On May 7th, Governor Gretchen Whitmer introduced the MI Safe Start Plan which reflects a six staged process to reopening Michigan. Click [Here](#) to see this plan. We take seriously this suggested plan and will include it as a part of our reopening process.

### **Phase 1-3 (moving into Stage 4 of MI Safe Start Plan)**

**Phase 1: Church at home and online.** Not only is worship online, but so is Wednesday prayer, small groups, youth group, family game nights. Our elders and staff are also making many contacts with people via phone and email.

**Phase 2: House gatherings.** As things open up, we will encourage existing small groups to get together, perhaps specifically for “watch parties” where they do worship, fellowship in the home, and weather permitting, encourage these gatherings to take place outside. We will also encourage home gatherings, where a couple families/couples decide to meet in someone's home or backyard to watch the service online. These would be informal groups that currently do not exist.

**Phase 3: Outdoor gatherings/drive-in at Church.** Since research supports that outdoor gatherings can be very safe and since our church has a nice space (whether parking lot or green space), we should have outdoor gatherings, whether it be a Sunday worship service or a weeknight gathering. We could experiment with various things, starting as early as June.

- Church is closed for all activities, including outdoor play equipment
- Proper signage at entrances to church building
- Adhere to state and local recommendations regarding tracking those who enter building.
- Designate a person/group responsible for updating CRC on state/local/health department requirements/guidelines
- Develop a team/staff to address specific reopening questions and communicate those plans to each other and the congregation.

- Consider viability/Implement drive-in church
- Streaming online worship via Facebook live continues
- Encourage home gatherings for worship (2-3 couples/families) using social distancing practices/masks
- Begin implementing Bible studies online
- Continue (with evaluation) all current online practices/communication

### **Phase 4 (moving into Stage 5 of MI Safe Start Plan)**

**Phase 4: Online and outside worship continue to be priority.** We will begin to experiment with in-person worship in small groups so we can establish protocols for social distancing, cleaning procedures, and seating and dismissal. *Use of building for small groups will be permitted until strict adherence to posted guidelines and the establishment of weekly and group-specific cleaning protocols.*

#### ***Phase 4 only to be implemented when:***

- *The church is thoroughly cleaned.*
- *Proper cleaning & sanitation procedures in place*
- *Church entrance tracking process in place for staff, volunteers, and visitors.*
- *Hand sanitizer stations set up at entrances to building and sanctuary and sanitizing stations set up in bathroom with clear directions.*

#### **Worship**

- 2 services each Sunday – 1<sup>st</sup> online only/2<sup>nd</sup> On site outside and drive-in church
- Worship will continue streaming online through Facebook live.
- Small groups/home gatherings watch streaming worship service together.
- Outside/ drive-in church will be the 'gathering' option.
- Children's ministry online / worship service more engaging for children
- No nursery will be offered.
- No bulletins will be handed out. We may hand out song sheets.
- Communion will be done via Facebook live – prepare your own elements at home. For outside/drive-in services, worshippers will be encouraged to bring their own elements.
- The building will be closed during outside/drive-in church other than access to bathrooms with sanitizing stations with clear directions.
- Offering will be collected by drop-off boxes by the parking lot and encouraged through online giving.
- Attendance may be taken for assessment purposes.
- Parking for outside/drive-in services will be designated with a full parking space between cars.

## **Fellowship**

- Limited sized groups will be allowed to use the building during the week if they follow social distancing guidelines and the instructions for cleaning the space and equipment (chairs, tables, etc.) they use.
- No coffee or refreshments served.
- More concerted efforts to utilize Zoom for groups (coffee hour, bible studies)
- Small groups & social gatherings in homes
- Fellowship will take place outside while practicing social distancing.

## **Outreach**

- Emphasis on connecting with online guests
- Encourage each other to care for community / Support Safe Haven & Kari's Closet's work
- Encourage members to connect with co-workers, neighbors, friends

## **Other**

- Staff will be able to work at church with strict social distancing practices - masks?
- Building will be cleaned daily
- Consistory, elders, deacons, and other teams will meet via Zoom

## **Communication**

- Email
- Website
- Video
- Facebook/Instagram
- Text Message
- Standard Mail

## **Phase 5-6 (moving into Stage 6 of MI Safe Start Plan)**

**Phase 5: Multiple Weekend Church Gatherings.** As we grow comfortable with larger gatherings and want to start inside Sunday church services, we will likely have multiple services. We will live stream one service. Even at this point, we may be hesitant to offer onsite Nursery & Kids Ministry. It probably won't happen until public schools begin to meet.

**Phase 6: New normal** - continuing to live into our mission, vision, values and priorities taking into account how best to provide a safe and welcoming experience for all. What that looks like is yet to be

clearly determined. Much of what we love and appreciate about being the Church will return. We all need to be patient and look to God's ongoing direction.

***Phase only to be implemented when:***

- *Arrival and dismissal process in place for Sunday Worship*
- *Proper signage within building*
- *Sanctuary seating arrangement clearly defined*
- *Social distancing will still be emphasized.*
- *Cleaning protocol established between services.*

**Worship**

- Worship will continue streaming online through Facebook live.
- Small groups/home gatherings watch streaming worship service together will remain an option.
- Worship at church will begin for limited-sized groups with strict physical distancing guidelines
- Pews in the worship space labeled to direct physical distancing
- Attendees will be asked to wear masks.
- Singing will likely not take place until it is deemed safe.
- Children's ministry continues online.
- Nursery will not be offered.
- No bulletins will be handed out.
- Bible will be removed from the pews. Please bring your Bible from home.
- Communion in sanctuary will be purchased individual cups/wafer or invited to bring their own elements.
- Unused portions of the building will be closed (Nursery, Children's Wing, Community Room, Kitchen)
- Signs will be throughout the building encouraging physical distancing and asking those who are at risk to consider alternative options.
- Offering will be collected by drop-off and encouraged through online giving.
- Hand sanitizers will be placed throughout the building—especially at the entrance as people enter and exit the building and in the bathrooms.
- All handouts will be removed from the Information Center
- Tables & furniture removed from the Fellowship Hall
- Attendance may be taken for potential tracking purposes

- Attendees will be encouraged to take seats immediately to avoid lingering in the Fellowship Hall
- Congregation will be dismissed in sections and encouraged to leave immediately.

### **Fellowship**

- Limited sized groups will be allowed to use the building during the week as long as they follow social distancing guidelines and the instructions for cleaning the space and equipment (chairs, tables, etc.) they use.
- No coffee, meals, refreshments served indoors.
- Small groups/home gatherings still encouraged
- Following services, all fellowship will take place outside practicing social distancing and encouraging ongoing use of masks.

### **Outreach**

- Same as Phase 4

### **Other**

- Same as Phase 4

## **Phase 6 (to be determined once its clear we are in Stage 6 with no regression)**

### **Worship**

- Livestream is still offered and promoted
- Sanctuary worship services without limitations on size
- On-site children's ministry returns
- Masks will be optional.

### **Fellowship**

- Refreshments are served with new procedures to limit handling and congregating
- Indoor food service will be re-evaluated based on health department recommendations.

### **Other**

- Elders, deacons, and consistory begin meeting at church
- Larger groups can begin meeting at church.