

Hello Living Waters,

I hope this most recent pastoral letter finds you doing well in these now quickly changing times. Given all that is happening I wanted to write to you about the changes to the covid policy we have made and some on the horizon. But first will you pray with me?

*O God the Holy Spirit, as we prepare to celebrate your triumphant revealing on pentecost, continue to show us the way forward. You are our helper and advocate, guide us as the Spirit of wisdom, give us the words and direction for these turbulent times. You care for our needs and have carried us this far, continue to renew us and your Church for our daily lives and collective mission ahead. Pour out your Spirit upon us all, inspire us to respond with lives of service, generosity and thanksgiving. To you almighty God we lift our prayers, trusting that you will answer in how you continuously abide in our lives. Amen!*

Indeed God continues to be at work at Living Waters. Ministry has blossomed despite this long time of adversity. Though it is not yet over, we can already sense God's deliverance taking hold in one small victory at a time. I have so enjoyed seeing so many of you through in-person worship, visitation, education, and events. I am also so thankful for the technology that allows us to connect with the folks who cannot yet be with us in-person, both due to the pandemic and the increasing demands and business of life. We have found ways to be Church together that is more inclusive than ever before, we will continue to build on this in the year to come! Our leaders have done an amazing job navigating the uncertain path, thanks be to God!

Now for the surprise announcement from the CDC this past Thursday. Our council was already scheduled to meet that night, so it worked out well for us. From the beginning of this entire pandemic, we have always sought our answers from scripture and prayerful discernment. We have and will continue to consult experts such as the CDC and IDPH, but most of all we will continue to be the Church by living out God's teachings. God teaches us to care for the vulnerable. We are entrusted by God to steward this congregation, namely shepherd the people who comprise it. As Christians we are called to a life of service in inclusive love for God and neighbor.

With this in mind, we have adapted our plan so worship changes can be made quickly for when God shows us it is the right time. I would expect in the coming weeks our worship experience will continue to evolve, step by step. An example of this is in our newest decisions for mask wearing at Living Waters. Masks outdoors are no longer required on the property, please still socially distance. Obviously, if you still wish to wear a mask you are more than welcome to do so. Indoors we are taking the week to week approach, so for now we are still requiring masks, even if you are fully vaccinated. This is a way we can be in solidarity together. When the time is right we will change the mask requirements.

Keeping the masks indoors also gives us more flexibility with other aspects of worship. Public recitation, like saying prayers and the creeds together is now allowed. Our capacity limit with the new bridge phase kicking in last Friday is now 88 people. We will still use a sign-up for services, but this might change if capacity limits increase again soon, which is expected. The next big hurdle of adding music back into the service is now on the radar for the first time, and with masks on it has a better chance to happen soon. Preparations for adding music have already begun! We can also begin to look at restoring parts of service we dropped due to the pandemic, and for the first time in over a year start to reimagine the worship experience to be more interactive and communal. This is all very exciting!

One precaution we are still taking is having one worship service. Given feedback we have received, starting in June the Sunday worship time will be at 10 am on a trial basis. We figure we try it out during the summer and if we don't like it we can change again later. Thank you for your willingness to try new things, I pray that these changes will help us reach new people.

Hybrid Church with both in-person and at home options is here to stay. Not only do we plan to continue offering service at home via the live stream, we are currently looking into funding via grants to improve this worship experience. This investment into our future will give us even more options for ministry, especially in ways that speak to the next generation of the faithful. I can't help but be excited for what God has in store for us in the future!

Finally, I want to reach out pastorally to you all as I am still worried about you and pray for you. Anxiety, depression, lethargy, and mental health crises are elevated in our world right now. You do not have to go through this alone! There are caring and well-trained professionals who can help you. I am always here to meet with and listen to you, I also can get you connected with expert help. Please know you are loved and give yourself grace in this hard time.

I will be in touch again as things continue to change. In the meantime, thank you for your patience and understanding. Thanks for being with us on this journey of life and collective ministry. As always your feedback is appreciated, I have never been in a pandemic before either, conversation is always helpful!

In Christ,

Pastor Zach