

Communication Plan

Dear Shepherd Church.

As you know, many parts of the country are opening back up, and here in California, I believe we are in phase 2. But because Churches are not listed until phase 4, I wanted to come and share with you a few thoughts on when we might start meeting together as a Church Family, rather than just online.

Our city officials do not have an easy job, and we need to continue to pray for them and all the people on the front lines, especially the Nurses and Doctors. We truly are indebted to all of our first responders.

My heart is torn, because, I want to start meeting again, like starting yesterday!!!! However, I feel as though it would NOT be in the best interest of our community, at this time.

You may have heard that there are close to 1000 churches that have decided to re-open on May 31st, in defiance of the Governor's stay at home orders. It is the belief of many Pastors that officials in Los Angeles and the State of California are NOT Church friendly. We know the state has deemed Liquor stores, Marijuana shops, Abortion clinics, and Home Depot stores as essential businesses, but NOT the Church.

From our viewpoint, the Church is the one entity equipped to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of our community and that the STATE should never have the right, to shut down the church. THAT GOES AGAINST THE CONSTITUTION and OUR FREEDOMS, THAT WE HOLD DEAR AS CITIZENS OF AMERICA.

I want to make something clear... We stopped our corporate worship services as a church, on all of our campuses, BEFORE the State shut the churches down. In other words, WE as a church, made the decision, to stop meeting on our own. We knew that it was the right thing to do. Not because of a law, but because of love, for you and for our community. And when we choose to start up again, it will NOT be because the State says we can or can't. It will be when we feel the Lord is leading us to start back up.

So again, in a couple of weeks, there will be close to 1000 churches, in the state of California, that will start meeting in defiance of Governor Newsom's order. And although, I respect their right and freedoms to do so, I am not yet personally, comfortable with that time frame.

In light of this, you might have questions about WHEN we might re-open.

There are 4 guiding principles that I want you to know.

These 4 principles will help form our decision in moving forward:

1. We've never closed! I repeat, We've never closed.

We don't feel pressured to "reopen" because we've never been more open than we are right now.

- We're reaching and engaging more people than ever before.
- People joining us for the first time. Barriers have never been lower.
- We have more people watching around the globe
- It's never been easier to join a Life Group, because you can do it virtually.
- We have many people responding to Jesus
- *We don't go to church...we are the church!*
- *The church is NOT a building, it's the people. I repeat, we've never closed.*
- I can't wait to gather again one day soon when it's safe to do so...but for now, we are still on mission.

2. We don't want to gather physically - too soon - and unnecessarily - jeopardize lives or ruin our witness to this city.

- We are listening attentively to medical professionals and government officials.
- We are being ultra-sensitive to how people are feeling and what their level of comfortability is in regards to being next to people.
- I think if we started meeting again soon, that most people would stay home.
- There are still many unknowns, and I don't want to put your life at risk or my own life at risk.
- We had a young man on staff, whose mother passed recently due to Covid-19 and all of us, are still shook up, due to that fact.
- We want to open soon, but we want to open safely.
- We are here to SERVE which means we'll make the well-being of our church family and our community a top priority.
- We think the earliest we would start holding church services on our campuses is July 4th weekend, which is two short months away. Or if we feel things are not right to start then, we might possibly wait until the middle of August, which would be closer to 4 months from now, when the children go back to School.
- In this uncertain environment, decisions like these aren't easy to make.

What I do know for certain is that we are still very much open—we've never closed.

3. We don't want to gather physically until it can be a great experience for EVERYONE, if we can help it.

- The idea of having a worship service with restricted numbers of people...keeping our distance from one another...with no children's ministry...and limiting it to certain age groups, and everyone scared half to death, isn't a great experience for anyone...let alone, for our first time guests.
- We are constantly talking to churches and Pastors, in other states that have already opened, to learn from them, on what is working and what is NOT working. I know of one large church that opened, they have, like a 4000 seat auditorium and had like 162 people show up.
- That tells us that people are not quite ready to be in large gatherings as of right now. But that could all change, at any moment.
- We would like to open, when it will be a great experience for all.
- And when we open, we will open with safety measures in place.

4. Lastly, and most importantly, We are waiting on the Lord for his leading and direction. Just like He led us to close BEFORE the government asked us to close, He will direct us on WHEN it's time to start back up. It might be before the government tells us it's ok, and it might be AFTER the government tells us it's ok. We will regather, when we feel the Lord is making that clear to us.

As a team, we're discussing ideas for what our next steps might be in the immediate future. But for right now, we are still in a holding pattern.

We'll be sure to communicate to you, as we circle in on a date. Again, we are looking at the first weekend of July, or possibly the end of August.

In the meantime, can I ask you to do 3 things?

1. Continue to stay engaged online

- I know you may be experiencing some screen fatigue with all the Zoom calls and e-learning going on.
- Remember, it's never been easier to invite someone. Grab a digital invite on our website or social media and share it with a friend.
- Share, comment, and engage with us no matter what platform you're joining us from.
- Children can join our children ministry online

- Students 7-12 are meeting online
- Everything at www.shepherdchurch.com

2. Continue connecting with your life group.

- Life Groups are the backbone of our church!
- If you're not in a group, start today. Look for groups on our Shepherd website
- I am going to preach a sermon soon on all the things God can do in your home. The N.T. church met in people's homes. Some of the greatest miracles happened in people's homes.
- God can perform any miracle in YOUR HOME.
- Let's invest in each other's lives, encouraging each other
- Stay connected to your life group.

3. Continue to serve our city.

- The physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual needs are great.
- We are formulating plans to mobilize to meet those needs.
- Your generosity equips us to meet the rapidly-growing needs as they arise.

This weekend, we are continuing our series on the Sands of Time. And if we learn anything from looking back over history, we know that God has never failed us in the past, and He's not going to fail us now!!! AMEN!!!!!!

This crisis is only deepening my love for you, our city, and our church. It's the honor of my life to be your pastor. I miss you and can't wait to be with you again physically...until then, I'll be with you online. Love you.