

Dear Church family,

I want to write to you all in response to the government announcing that churches can meet in Phase three of coming out of lockdown but with very restrictive guidelines.

However, before I do that I want to say that I am so encouraged by how people have sought to support one another during these challenging times.

God on the move

Our building may have been closed but the church has very much been open. In fact, one thing that this period of lockdown has underlined for the church is not just a building or a large gathering. Jesus has been building his church (Mth 16) in these last four months.

The wonderful reality is that God has been on the move in amazing ways during these challenging times. Let me mention just a few ways God has been at work:

- The number of people engaging with our online services has increased.
- People have cared for one another in wonderful ways.
- We have added to our staff team.
- Our giving has continued to be encouraging.
- A new small group has formed.

Phase 3 and a physical gathering

It is a really difficult thing to navigate a global pandemic. I appreciate your gracious attitude at this difficult time and your desire to work towards upholding the unity of the fellowship.

I've had some chats with people this week about 'missing church', and 'getting back to normal'.

I am keen to worship together with my church family in full again but only when it is wise and safe to do so. However, we want to move forward and not go backwards. We want to move forward to the new normal and to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church. There are many opportunities for us in mission and ministry and we must be bold and courageous.

Regarding the potential of a physical gathering the guidelines at the moment are very restrictive. A physical gathering is limited to 50 people including stewards. Those who gather will have to maintain a 2 metre social distance and there is no singing allowed. These are just a few of the restrictions.

However, we are aiming to begin weekly physical gatherings in the week beginning the 17th August in the church. This is an aspirational date dependant on the guidelines from the government and the specific meeting and time will be confirmed with the church family in the near future.

Ministry and Mission

The ministry and mission of the church continues at this time.

The three core activities of worship, community life and mission will continue in different ways. It is an opportunity for extraordinary creativity as we discover how the Lord is leading us to be church in these days.

- a. **Worship-** We will continue a weekly stream of our online service at 1030am on Sunday's via the church facebook page and our you tube channel. This will also be recorded and uploaded to our church website. Cd's will also be available to those who need them. The pastor will also produce Bible study questions and notes that will be distributed for personal study. I also point you to the Bible in a year resource produced by Nicky Gumbel.
<https://www.bibleinoneyear.org/>

b. Community life

Small groups- The majority of our church small groups have now recommenced online. These provide an opportunity for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. If you would like to join a small group please contact the office.

Prayer- For the moment we continue to hold our weekly prayer gathering via the church facebook page on Wednesday evenings. We will also seek to distribute weekly prayer points via the bulletin, which will be posted online and via email. Please commit time to pray for one another and the needs highlighted. I have committed to daily pray for every person and household who are part of our church family.

Fellowship- On a Thursday evening we run a quiz via zoom. The Men's breakfast and the fusion group are also running via zoom. (Consult the bulleting for information)

Pastoral care- I want each one of you to know you are deeply loved and cared for. As a family we may not be in contact face to face but there are many ways that we can care for one another. Keep connected with your small group and friends. The Pastoral care team will be regularly in touch with people over email, social media, phone and text. Please get in touch with us if you have a pastoral concern.

Discipleship explored- This ministry will begin on zoom on Sunday the 2nd August so that people can get meet and get familiar with the technology and the course will then officially start on the 9th August. Please register vis the office if you are interested.

d. Mission- "You are the light of the world"

You are the light of the world and your mission field is your street and your neighbourhood. Also there are so many opportunities to be a witness and light through your life. These are days of opportunity before a watching world. Two resources that we can use for mission are those highlighted below.

- **Try Praying-** This is another resource that you can continue to use. The desire to reach out to God is basic to many, many people. Try Praying is a resource for people like that: no church connection or interest, but open to find out about God. The Try Praying booklet or App is a 7-day prayer guide and is now being used by many to pass on to friends and family with a few words of encouragement, 'Why don't

you try praying for a week and see what happens in your life?’

<https://www.trypraying.co.uk/try-it/>

- Alpha online- We are planning to run Alpha online via zoom at some point in the near future. If you are interested in helping please contact the office.

Light of the world

Our verse for the year is *Matthew 5v14* " *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*"

I have been so encouraged in the last four months to see the church shine in our community.

Jesus said "***You are the light of the world.***" In these words, Jesus commands the Christian to be like him. Jesus himself said in John's Gospel Chapter 9v5: "***While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.***"

Consequently, when Jesus commanded his followers to be the light of the world he was demanding nothing less than they should be like himself.

As Christians, and as the Church we are to glorify God the father, by reflecting the light of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. "***We are the light of the world.***"

When Jesus said this he was saying that:

- Our light is to be seen. ***A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*** This reinforces the fact that we are to stand out. To be different, to be seen. As believers we are to be conspicuously different.
- We are to shine for God's glory. "***Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. V16***"

People are to see our good deeds. In Greek, there are two words for good. There is the word *agathos*, which simply defines a thing as good in quality; and there is *kalos*, which means a thing that is not only good but that it is also captivating and beautiful and attractive. The word that is used here is *kalos*. Our good deeds should be captivating, beautiful and attractive.

As Christians we are to shine in the darkness. Jesus says:

"You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Keep shining.

If you have any questions regarding some of the implications of phase three please contact Joe or Pete.

With much love in Jesus

Pastor Rae