

Corona Virus and Reopening Issues [June 5, 2020]

Hi Valley Church Family,

I hope you've had a chance to read my first "weekly" from Tuesday about the racial violence and rioting that our country is experiencing. It comes on top of an already difficult situation regarding the Covid 19 pandemic and the shelter in place regulations we're all under. I hope you'll listen for God's voice in the services this weekend. No doubt my words will fall short of the issues, but I'm trusting that God will speak to your heart for healing and strength.

Let me share where we are on the reopening issue. On Monday, May 25th, Governor Newsom announced new guidelines allowing churches to meet publicly. But while the majority of California has moved into Phase 3 of its reopening, Santa Clara is one of 11 counties that has not approved the state guidelines. This past Tuesday the county released guidelines allowing up to 25 people to meet outdoors. While some small groups are looking at meeting again, we're still a long way from being back together as a church body!

I have heard from members of our church family with various opinions about reopening our campus. Some are eager to meet in person as soon as possible. Others are pleading for us not to open until much later. Emotions run high on both sides. I suspect that our timeline for reopening will be too soon for some and not soon enough for others. Each person must do what they believe is right for their own families. We totally respect and support this.

My heartfelt prayer is that our unity will not be shattered over disagreement about precise reopening dates. Jesus prayed for us to be one, and we can do that as we focus on having a great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Given the regulations for reopening churches of our size and complexity, there are a lot of details to work out. I have asked our pastors and staff to put together proposals and timelines for how we might respond as a church to these specific rules. We're watching the news and doing our best to understand and be prepared for everything we need to do to reopen safely and legally as soon as possible.

I was on a call with pastors of other Bay Area churches last week. The reopening dates they projected for their churches under these new regulations ranged from Father's Day, June 21 to mid-September, with most estimating that they would reopen in mid-August. They all agreed it will take time to do this right. Valley church has signed the Statement of Unity with many other church on reopening at <http://www.tbc.city/statement-of-unity>. You can find more information there.

I want to assure you that we all share the same goal— to reopen our campus in a way that is wise, safe, and loving. And we must continually keep in mind that what we do impacts not just our church, but the broader community, too.

Let's remember the astonishing power of the Holy Spirit to empower the church in times of trial. Let's live through this with patience and endurance, and then, in due time, we will be able to gather again with joy and confidence! I don't think anyone longs for that more than I do!

Please pray for me and the other leaders at Valley Church, that we will have wisdom. We appreciate the prayer and support.

In Christ,

Kurt Jones

Lead Pastor, Valley Church of Cupertino

P.S. I've attached a brief list of some of the issues we're keeping in mind while we talk and pray about reopening.

P.P.S. In my message this weekend I mention four black pastors I've been listening to and learning from. I don't agree with everything that was said, but you can listen for yourself [here](#).

SCRIPTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hebrews 10:25 instructs us to be careful of *"...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near."* God told His people to gather together for a purpose. We are a body and need to be connected. Together we represent Christ to the world and operate as His hands and feet in the world.

At the same time, the Bible instructs us to obey the civil authorities—unless they are asking us to deny Christ as Lord or commit a sin. In all other cases, we are to obey them.

1 Peter 2:13-17 says, *"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."* These instructions were given to Jews and Christians living under severe persecution and the emperor referred to here was Nero!

While nothing beats being together, we ARE gathering weekly with our online services and prayer groups. Small groups are meeting virtually every week to study God's word and pray together. Students are live-streaming and children's programming is being shared online with our families. Every single one of our ministry teams is learning and growing through this time, eagerly considering new strategies that will allow us to best serve our congregation and community through this season and beyond.

WITNESS CONSIDERATIONS

I hope our choice to move through this process at a careful pace will be a reflection to our community of the thoughtfulness of our faith in Jesus. It would be foolish to downplay the severity of COVID-19, rush to reopen, and then have the very churches publicly clamoring for an early return become objects of

negative attention as centers of new outbreaks. Of course, I know that's not what anyone wants, but it's a realistic concern.

The reputation of evangelical churches is already battered in the media. Opening prior to government approval and endangering progress on this disease would greatly undercut our efforts to reach unsaved and unchurched people—something far more important than our current temporary restrictions. After all, the church has not stopped being the church.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

We care deeply about human life, because we agree with Scripture that every person has infinite worth and is created in the image of God. Again, our team is monitoring the latest developments in science and public policy daily and look forward to the day we will meet together again with new safety protocols in place. Keeping our children safe is a very specific concern we have and we are asking God for wisdom to know how to do this well. Most likely we'll be looking to our public schools for best practices.

MINISTRY CONSIDERATIONS

Valley Church is more than a building or a campus. We are "open" even while our physical campus remains closed for large gatherings. We remain open because so many of you, our volunteers, along with staff and pastors, continue to love people in the name of Jesus! We continue to serve the community through our Shepherd's Table, Meals Ministry, and Benevolence while continuing to support our Global Partners all around the world!

Do we want to rush past the lessons God is teaching us through the Joel moments in this unique circumstance? Our times of fasting and prayer every Wednesday have yielded rich lessons for us in humility and dependence on the Lord. Many of us have seen God point out powerful lessons we never would have seen if it weren't for this trial. Many families are finding better connections around God's Word than they have before. Small groups are leaning on each other more deeply than ever. I'm seeing newfound unity and cooperation among the churches in the Valley. Let's make sure we don't miss out on all the Lord has for us to learn during these days.