



First Baptist Church

After much discussion and prayer, FBC facilities will remain closed during the month of September. The State Journal reported on 8.31, *"Sunday's new-case report gives state largest one-week total of COVID-19 cases."* Our church survey strongly indicated the vast majority of you believe that at this time, we should stay with the virtual church experiences. So the facilities will remain closed with two exceptions. Michelle (Associate Pastor of Missions) is going to manage a very small number of volunteers to help sort clothes in the Clothes Closet. Amanda (Associate Pastor of Children & Spiritual Formation) is going to host some of the families of children (one family at a time) to make tie-dye masks and to get to know these folks. Both of these exceptions will take into consideration many precautions concerning the virus. I feel confident that with very few people, socially distanced, masked and other protocols in place, these activities can be done safely.

Worship is a different kind of experience. With the quantity of time and potential aerosol contamination spread through the forceful breath of singing and responsive reading, among other worship participation, I am nervous about the success of regathering. If we did regather for worship during the pandemic, it would be with very few groupings scattered throughout the Sanctuary, full-time masks, no singing and no other meaningful involvement from the congregation. When I presented this possibility to the panel of healthcare providers I've been emailing the past handful of months, there was mixed response. Some said it could be done in a safe and healthy manner; others advised it would not be prudent to regather at this time. I am not comfortable with moving forward regarding regathering for worship when the experts I rely on are divided. To be honest, I also do not want to be or want our staff to be some type of pandemic police of reminding/requiring folks to mask up or social distance, etc. We will stay the course with our virtual experiences for September and revisit what we need to do in the near future at the end of the month. I appreciate everyone's support concerning this decision. I

know there are some who disagree, but at least up until this point, we have maintained a healthy sense of unity (not uniformity) and I pray this continues.

I have been in some type of ministerial leadership role since I was nineteen years old. This is by far the most difficult ministry experience I can remember. I've presided over some very sad funerals of dear friends, young people, soldiers, even babies. My church in Texas kept 50+ evacuees in our Fellowship Hall during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for weeks at a time. I've counseled people through divorce, abuse and some of the most heartbroken grief imaginable. I've watched people leave the church over the shallowest things. I'm not saying I would want to revisit any of those experiences, but I am almost at the point of saying I'd trade this pandemic for those difficulties. BUT... we will get through this. God is faithful. Prayerfully, we will be stronger because of this hardship.

Please pray for your staff. Pray for each other. Pray for the eradication of this virus. Pray for ways to use this time to creatively CONNECT, GROW and SERVE. I love you all and miss you terribly. Thank you for supporting the church financially and participating virtually during these challenging times.

In Christ,

Pastor Keith