



May 20, 2020

Hi, church family. We have missed seeing you, talking with you, fellowshiping with you, and doing ministry with you. The past 10 weeks have been difficult for many of us, and there may still be challenging days ahead. As of today, though, the news is good. Active COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Coweta county and in Georgia are decreasing; according to the Georgia Department of Public Health, the 7-day average of new cases has been declining since April 22, 2020. With shelter-in-place orders expired for many Georgians – and expiring for the rest of the state on June 12 – Macedonia is in a position to reopen in-person worship services for those who want to attend.

When will we be back to normal again? That is a question whose answer is subject to change according to government guidelines and the needs of the congregation. The reality is that some things may never be as they once were. The staff has received a lot of advice on reopening the church to public worship services, including guidance from the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, the federal phased reopening guidelines that were published on April 16, 2020, and Georgia-specific guidelines following Gov. Kemp's address on April 20. Since the governor's address, much of the state of Georgia has begun operating on a Phase 1 basis. Though the rules for churches are vague, it seems reasonable to begin a limited reopening of public worship at Macedonia for those who are comfortable returning. For the foreseeable future, we will encourage anyone who is uncomfortable with gathering on campus, along with anyone who is ill or has been recently exposed to COVID-19, to join us online for worship.

Having consulted with the deacons, the staff recommends the following plan for reopening services. Through the end of May, we will limit crowd size to 25% of the worship center capacity (approximately 85 people). As our area progresses into the higher phases and social restrictions are decreased, gathering sizes and practices can be adjusted accordingly. Of course, should the government increase restrictions, we will adjust when and how we meet. The deacons and staff will reassess the worship services and capacity after May 31, 2020.

As a test run on May 17, 2020, we invited the graduating seniors, the youth department, and their immediate families to participate in on-campus worship. This first limited gathering allowed

Love God



Love People



Love the World

us to see how the proposed changes might work or be improved for future services. Several of those lessons will influence our future gatherings.

From Sunday, May 24, 2020, until the Phase 2 guidelines apply to our area, we will invite anyone who wants to attend to sign-up in advance. To help us in planning, please sign-up no later than the Thursday prior to the service you wish to attend. You can sign-up by clicking the link on the church website (www.mbcnewnan.com) or by calling the church office (770-253-7222).

Because we are limiting capacity in the worship center, seating will be pre-organized and spaced based on sign-ups. Depending on sign-ups, people may be asked to attend in overflow spaces where they will participate in the live streamed service. On-campus viewing of the live streamed services will allow us to accommodate more people while still adhering to social distancing. In order to accommodate an organized entry/exit for each service, a deacon or member of the staff will provide instructions for exiting the worship center and/or overflow spaces.

Understanding that many in the congregation have concerns about being in public places and gatherings, we have made preparations to address those concerns, taking into account suggestions from both medical and ministry experts. In general, these suggestions are intended to mitigate risk factors and are related to items that are touched by multiple people, activities that discourage social distancing, and areas concerning cleaning and hygiene. We are planning to make the following changes for our first several gatherings back, though some of these changes may become permanent.

Here are some things that will remain the same (or very similar) in our worship experience.

- You will still be able to pray, to sing praises, to lift your hands, and to clap in worship.
- You are still encouraged to read from your Bible, take sermon notes, and say “Amen.”
- You will still be able to talk with a pastor.
- You will be encouraged to come to the altar to pray (with appropriate distancing).
- Children are always WELCOME in the worship service. They are gifts from God and will not be a distraction.
- You will still have a bulletin. Pick one up from the lobby table.
- You will still be able to give your offering. Deposit your gift in the box/plate at the doors of the Worship Center as you leave.
- You will still celebrate communion. As we gather on June 7 and have the Lord’s Supper, pick up your factory-sealed elements from the table in the lobby.
- The facilities will continue to be cleaned/sanitized before and after services.

These things will be different from our worship experience before the pandemic.

- The live streamed service begins at 10am. Plan to arrive by 9:50am and go directly to your seats.
- Wearing masks is acceptable, but not mandatory. If you want to wear a mask you can bring a clean one from home or wear a single-use mask provided by the church.
- Be aware of signage regarding social distancing and other guidelines while on-campus.
- Please use hand sanitizer upon entering the facilities. It will be available in several places.
- Sit together with members of your household and keep the appropriate distance (4 chairs ≈ 6 feet) between yourselves and other families.
- When exiting, wait for instructions and then proceed outdoors to converse with your friends.
- Avoid on-campus circumstances where you cannot practice social distancing (i.e. handshakes and hugs, congregating in the lobby, greetings around entry doors, etc.). This change will be tough but necessary, out of respect for others who want to come but are anxious about coming.
- Childcare will not be offered during worship services until a later date. We realize not having childcare might be a challenge for some families, but the overwhelming advice we've received discourages it.
- Continue participating in small group/Sunday School Bible studies online. Some small groups may be able to meet in an open-air and/or socially distanced settings.

As we have always encouraged, even before the pandemic, please stay home if you are ill. No one experiencing any signs of illness should attend. (i.e. fever, coughing, sneezing, loss of smell/taste, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.), and they should remain home until they have been symptom free for at least 24 hours. Furthermore, if there is someone sick in your household, the whole household should stay at home. If you are anxious about gathering right now, have underlying medical conditions, or have reason to suspect you've recently been exposed to COVID-19 or another serious illness, please remain at home and worship with us online. Feeling like you cannot attend at this time does not lessen the fact that you are an important part of this church family.

We have faced challenging days over the past two and a half months, but Macedonia is a strong church filled with wonderful people, and we have a great God. As we press forward together, let's keep our focus on advancing Christ's kingdom—sharing His message and His love among ourselves and with those in our community.

If you have questions, please contact us. Matthew can be reached at 678-850-8159. John can be reached at 770-328-2450, and Terrina can be reached at 770-301-0514.

In Christ,

Matthew, John, and Terrina