

Dear FBC Rome Family,

Last night, at a called Deacon's meeting, our leadership voted unanimously to move forward with two plans to re-engage with in-person ministry at First Baptist Church. This decision was made after much discussion in previous weeks with the leadership of the Covid Task Force and our deacons and staff, and of course through much prayer. We will continue to seek the best wisdom of how to respond to the changing landscape around us all while trying to make choices that keep in mind the health and safety of our members and guests, our desire to offer our best to God and each other, and the vitality and engagement of our membership. We fully recognize that some members will feel like these steps take us forward too quickly while other members may feel like we never should have stopped having services, and that breadth of opinion about how we do things feels pretty Baptist to me.

The first plan, which will begin tonight (9/9) for youth and children, concerns small group ministry and Bible study. In order to facilitate the space needs of each of our Bible study groups and age graded ministries, we have spread out our children and students and adults around the building. Kristen has communicated with all of the parents of our children about where their child will be entering the building and which room(s) they will be using, and will be walking them through the changes tonight. John has done the same with our students, and has prepared a video that does the same for our students.

For adults during the week, we will have a couple of options that will begin on 9/16 and are a virtual/in-person hybrid. Matt will lead a virtual Zoom prayer meeting from the chapel that will give a time for fellowship and connection and also sharing prayer requests from 6-6:15 and then begin a Bible study at 6:20 that will last until approximately 7pm. There will be room for 10 family units to gather in person in the chapel if so desired for the Bible study, and they will need to sign up ahead of time to ensure enough room. We will also have Bible studies for different adult groups (men and women) resuming during the week from Monday-Friday. With any of our Bible studies or small group gatherings, we are asking that all groups abide by a shared set of commitments to one another: Wear masks at all times while we are inside, spatially distance ourselves, use hand sanitizer, and stay home if we are sick or in quarantine. We will take temperatures upon arrival, and anyone with a temperature above 100.4 degrees will be asked to return home. The ministers or Bible study leaders will take roll of those gathered so that we can do contact tracing if necessary, should someone test positive after attending an event. Our Task Force and deacons feel that by spacing ourselves out and wearing our masks and limiting our contact time with one another, that we will be able to regather as safely as is possible at this time. Of course, we will also make every effort to offer virtual opportunities to gather so that those who cannot be in person because of health reasons or personal choice can still participate.

The second plan, which we are planning to begin on September 20th, concerns resuming in-person worship. This past Sunday, a small group of our deacons came to help run through and troubleshoot the procedures that we will have in place when we resume. On the Monday before each Sunday, we will provide a new Eventbrite sign-up link on with a set number of spaces for the coming Sunday service that church members will be able to sign up for. If you do not have internet, you may call Melinda Duke and ask her to register you for worship and she will confirm a space for you if they are available. The link will be live until all available spaces

are taken up on Thursday afternoon, whichever comes first. After signing up, you will receive a confirmation email that you are registered for worship. This registration is important because it will help us with contact tracing, should someone attend worship and then test positive in the days following.

We will have two entrances at the back of the sanctuary that are clearly marked and will open those doors for worship 30 minutes before worship begins and we ask that all registered worshippers be in their seat and prepared to worship no later than 10 minutes before time to begin. We ask that you maintain your distance as you queue, and your temperature will be checked before entering. Masks will be required the entire time, and you will be ushered to a specific place to sit as we fill up the sanctuary from the front to the back. We ask that you stay in your pew once you are seated unless you need to use the restroom. In that case, restrooms are available in the narthex or downstairs in the fellowship hall. We will exit the sanctuary from back to front, so once worship is finished we ask that you remain in your pew until the row that is behind you has exited.

The first week, we will begin with 50 worshippers in the sanctuary. We will evaluate the process and need for more seating each week and will adjust accordingly. If need be, we can also add an 8:30am service that will not be televised as well as overflow in the fellowship hall during the 11am service that will have the livestreamed broadcast projected on the stage.

By choosing to come to worship or participate in small group Bible studies, you are committing to comply with the rules and expectations that the deacons and leadership have agreed to and set forth. We ask that you use good judgement. If you do not feel comfortable attending at this time or are in a high-risk category, we ask that you not put yourself or loved ones at risk and participate virtually until things change. If you want to come and gather in person, but aren't willing to participate by the guidelines that our leadership has unanimously agreed to, we ask that you continue to participate virtually until those guidelines change.

If you have questions about this or want to talk it through with Matt or one of the ministers or Tara Inman, our current deacon chair, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are hopeful that as we make these adjustments, we will continue to keep our hearts and minds focused on why we gather for worship and Bible study—to grow as followers of Christ and to honor God with our very best. Thank you for your faithfulness to God and to FBC Rome through these days, and for your continued support as we adjust. We are still convinced our best days are ahead of us.

Gratefully,

The Leadership at FBC Rome