



June 5, 2020

Dear Town Church family,

On May 25, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued COVID-19 guidance on how churches can resume meeting, provided they meet the guidelines. On May 26, the Humboldt County Health Officer gave the go ahead for churches to meet for in-person services, provided they meet the safety modifications given by the CDPH. As a result, quite a few churches across our state and county have begun to hold in-person gatherings again.

The Leadership Advisory Team (myself, Dave Mathieson, and Lauren VanderWall) met on Monday, June 1, to pray and discuss what it would look like for The Town Church to begin meeting again in person. Each of us have reviewed the guidelines from the state and county. The guidance is quite stringent; there are limitations on the size of the gatherings we can have (a maximum of 30 people in our building at a time), assigned seating arrangements, no children's ministry, vigorous cleaning and sanitation requirements, along with social distancing and mask recommendations. In addition, there are many other safety procedures and recommendations that would prove challenging to those who serve our church in leadership and volunteer positions, to say nothing of those who attend our gatherings.

Our goal during in this matter is to ensure that our in-person gatherings are a more meaningful experience than the online ones we've had over the past 3 months. The implementation of the CDPH guidelines make this quite difficult. At the same time, we want to be certain that the experience for those who are unable to meet with us is truly representative of what is happening "live" during our gatherings. We want those who need to remain home to feel as connected as possible and to know that they continue to be a vital part of our church family.

With all these factors in mind, **we will continue to have our gathering online for the foreseeable future.** But we will not be standing idle—we will be working diligently toward reopening. We will be submitting a Reopening Plan to the county in the next week. We will be preparing our building with the necessary safety precautions. We will be investing in equipment that will allow us to livestream our Sunday gatherings in a modest but meaningful way. We will be getting more clarity from the county about not only in regards to our Sunday gatherings, but also other opportunities for us to be together as a church family. It is our hope and prayer that as things calm down and continue to open up, we will soon be able to host small gatherings, meet-ups, and see our Gospel Communities gathering together in homes once again. It may not be long until we determine that it is time to begin meeting together on Sunday mornings.

Please trust me when I say that our sincere desire is to be meeting in person this Sunday—and that we never had to stop. It's been almost 10 years since we planted The Town Church and it has nearly broken my heart to be away from you all for so long. For the last decade, we have been part of each other's families, sat around one another's tables, and walked through our deepest joys and darkest valleys together. Above all, we have grown in our delight in Jesus as we've declared and displayed his good news as a community.

It's true—this season has been a great trial for our faith. However, we will not be overcome by the difficulties we are facing. The church is a people and not a place. We can continue to be the church and live out the Gospel and the kingdom of God whether we are scattered or gathered. We *will* gather again. But until we do, my prayer and hope is that in this season of uncertainty, that you would live with the unshakeable certainty that nothing will stand and prevail against the church of Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18).

Now I want to ask you to do 2 things:

First, I ask that you fill out this survey about our gathering options moving forward. This will help our leadership team and volunteers make decisions that have been informed by your feedback. Find the survey at: <https://thetownchurch.churchcenter.com/people/forms/140691>

Second, I ask that you show grace to our leadership team and to one another as we might disagree on some of these things. Pray for me as your pastor. Pray for our Leadership Advisory Team. Pray for one another. Pray for Eureka and Humboldt County. Pray for our nation. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, that together we would endure in our love for Jesus and the people he has called to be faithful witnesses to.

I close with the words of the Apostle Paul from Colossians 3:12-15:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

In the hope of Christ,
Pastor Nate Downey