



Dear Family of Families,

This letter will cover three things. First, I would like to share some thoughts about how we approach Session's decision to re-assimilate and re-open our doors on May 17th. Then I want to lay out our game plan for reopening with the guidelines that Session has approved. I will close with a reminder of our Summer schedule of 10am services.

1. OUR APPROACH REQUIRES GRACE

John 1:16 *"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."*

I do believe that a key word to describe how we navigate re-assimilation amid the realities of COVID19 is this: GRACE. One of the most challenging aspects of recovery will be disagreements over what is socially acceptable. Everyone is different and opinions can be used to divide, making things get ugly real quick. Accusations can come from all sides, calling cautious people "soft" and labeling confident people as "reckless". We must extend a lot of grace since we are a unique blend of experiences, vulnerabilities, preferences, tendencies, and talents.

I want to quote from Pastor Costi Hinn about this reality, reminding us that everyone is navigating a new frontier that requires grace.

IT'S OK TO BE DIFFERENT

Perhaps you relate to one or more aspects of the following profiles:

Cautious: *Those who primarily work from home, follow every aspect of CDC regulations, and prefer to stay conservative about their re-assimilation plan.*

Confident: *Those who don't wear a mask, spend greater amounts of time with people outside their home and don't mind tight proximity, obey the law but don't necessarily worry much about going the extra-mile with precautions, lean towards re-assimilation now regardless of the news, and some think this crisis may be blown way out of proportion.*

"Cautio-dent": *Those who find themselves doing and feeling a little bit of everything in both the cautious and the confident profile.*

For highly confident optimists, others are much too conservative. Perhaps, some would even accuse others of living by fear and not faith — which can be true of all of us at times.

For cautious types, confident optimists may be too relaxed as the "what ifs" begin to creep into their minds. They think, what do we gain by re-assimilating so quickly? Isn't it better to be safe than sorry?

To have a healthy family and a healthy church there must be room for different opinions and experiences. These differences often stretch us and help us grow together and learn from each other. A healthy relational ecosystem allows for "different."

ATTITUDE DETERMINES ALTITUDE

Here are 4 attitudes for COVID-19 recovery that will help us get above the fray and strengthen your ability to navigate differing views and approaches:

Optimistic people are a blessing to my life. *It keeps me hopeful about the future and enables me to embrace uncertainty as opportunity.*

Cautious people are a blessing to my life. *It keeps me sensitive to the needs and concerns of others and enables me to make prudent decisions.*

Different gifts and approaches make us all more effective. *Pride demands that everyone do things the way we demand. Read 1 Corinthians 12 and celebrate different gifts.*

People matter more than my opinion. *Being in healthy relationships with people is a privilege that requires me to love others above myself. When I am highly opinionated, I can needlessly hurt others.*

CHOOSE LOVE

In the end, these attitudes prepare our hearts and minds to do one thing above all else: choose love. Look, when this crisis begins to wind down, there will be plenty of people who got some things right, and plenty of people who got some things wrong. There will be those who blew things out of proportion, and those who didn't take things as seriously as they should've.

What will it matter if we re-assimilate only to end up "socially distant" again not because of a virus, but because of our inability to love others who approach COVID-19 differently than we do?

This article has helped my perspective while trying to navigate our church family through these times. The key word I keep saying in my mind, in my heart and on occasion out loud, is "GRACE."

2. OUR PLAN FOR REOPENING

At this time, and with the boundaries stated in *South Dakota's Back To Normal Plan* and the City of Brandon's *Resolution 13-20 of Ordinance No. 606*, we will open the doors for Sunday Morning Service starting May 17th. Please do not feel you have to come to a service if you are not ready. Non-attendance does not mean non-support, and we will continue to have our services available through other means. Things could change quickly if the Session determines it is in the best interest of our church family and the community to revisit our plan and make changes. We will inform everyone to the best of our abilities through our website, emails, and social media any changes.

Please be mindful of the following guidance:

- *Stay home when sick*
- *Wash your hands well and often*
- *Limit contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet)*
- *If you fall in the more "vulnerable" category, we recommend you make your decision based on what is safest for you and your family.*
- *If you or someone you know tests positive, please let us know so we can find a way to help, pray for everyone involved, and take any necessary precautions on our church campus*

We are committed to keeping our campus clean (*with grace for our construction areas*) and will implement the following during this time:

- **SANITATION:** Hand sanitizer will be by both entrances to the sanctuary and the Family Room. All door handles and common use surfaces will be thoroughly cleaned before service.
- **FACE MASKS:** Masks will not be required but you are welcome to wear one.
- **SEATING:** You may sit with people that you normally are quarantined with. Every other row will be available and we ask that you stagger seating for 6 feet of separation between quarantine groups. City of Brandon ordinance 606 asks that we limit our gathering to half our capacity. If we are filling up and it looks like you might have to sit too close to another person or family, the service will be digitally fed to Family Room for more seating and space. Please arrive early enough to make arranging easier.
- **GREETING AND BULLETINS:** Greeters will still be on break – bulletins can be picked up at the back table.
- **CHILDREN:** There will be no nursery or Kid-connect programming. If you come with your children we ask that they sit with you during the service. Take home activity bags will be provided.
- **TITHES AND OFFERINGS:** We will not pass the plate for offerings. Instead, offering plates will be placed at each exit and up front on the altar, for receiving tithes and offerings after the service. All methods of online giving, text-to-give, Church Center App, and such will still be available and we encourage you to use or even try these new options for a short time.
- **MEET AND GREET:** We will take a break from our “meet and greet” tradition of going around and shaking hands. We ask that you limit all contact except with people you already quarantine with.
- **THE LORD’S SUPPER:** We will take a break from celebrating the Lord’s Supper and will reevaluate monthly.
- **FELLOWSHIP TIME:** We are encouraging people to limit contact and to not stay for fellowship time.
- **SERVICES ONLINE:** Our service is available for livestreaming on Sunday Morning, archived on our website and available for viewing through Alliancecom on Thursdays at 6:30pm.
- **OTHER ACTIVITIES:** Until further notice, we will have no group activities at the church. Ministry Committees, Life Groups, and Construction Groups will decide for themselves if and how they will still meet, using common sense and wisdom. Youth Groups and outside groups will be asked to take a break until further notice.

Helpful information:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/covid-19-coronavirus-infographic-datapack/>, I found this very helpful in my perception of what is going on. I am a very visual person, so I appreciated the perspective.
- https://cityofbrandon.org/vertical/sites/%7B23CB10F0-8C35-4CA4-9AD1-B693F0F58E76%7D/uploads/Resolution_13-20_-_FINAL-Declaring_a_Health_Emergency.pdf, City of Brandon Resolution 13-20 of Ordinance NO. 606.
- <https://covid.sd.gov>, South Dakota’s Back To Normal Plan

3. OUR SUMMER SCHEDULE: 10am service starting May 17th.

We were scheduled to move to a Summer Schedule of 10am services starting Memorial Day weekend - May 24th, that would go through Labor Day Weekend - September 6th.

Having a significant change of activities on May 17th with reopening our doors on a limited basis, and then having a time change one week later, seemed to double up our adjustment. So, we will start our summer schedule of 10am Worship Service on May 17th at the same time as reopening our doors in order to get used to our new scheduling all at once.

CONCLUSION

If you'd like to share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas with us as we navigate our response to this situation, we'd love to hear from you. Your input and feedback are truly important to us.

We may all stand at different places within the Confident / Cautious profiles. We may all have differing opinions on when to show up at church again. And that is OK. While we cannot control all aspects of this virus, we're doing everything we can to make our campus as safe and clean as possible for those who are healthy and want to participate in person. We appreciate your cooperation and commitment to help us do just that and to show grace to everyone in our Family of Families.

Micah 7:7 reminds us to look first to the LORD, to trust in God's saving work, and know that God hears our prayers. "But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." Let us continue to walk by faith and pray faithfully during this season.

I love and miss you greatly. Thanks for all the support you have shown me during this time as your pastor. Your encouragement has helped sustain me during these stormy times.

Pastor Tony Toth