

May 13, 2020

Dear Calvin Family,

Last week I shared that Calvin Church's Session had formed a church "Re-Opening Committee" to discern, explore, and plan for what opening the church up for in person Sunday morning worship, as well as small group activities, needs to look like. I want to let you know in more detail what this entails.

One piece – *but only one piece* – of this puzzle is what is allowed by Rhode Island's restrictions and guidelines. For example, what size groups are able and allowed to safely meet together. As I write this, the current number under Rhode Island's restrictions is 5. Sunday morning worship at the church cannot happen until that number is at least large enough to reasonably accommodate our average attendance.

However, there are other considerations as well. We must consider things such as how we handle a situation where more people show up for worship than the allowable group size, and the reality that group size restrictions and allowances will also presume physical distancing of those of different households. This means the ability to maintain 6 feet of distance between one another. This has ramifications for *how* we are able to gather for worship together in a shared space, such as the sanctuary.

What in person, corporate worship looks like involves further considerations. For example, there is growing evidence that singing, for example, increases the risk of viral transmission.

Finally, underneath all of these types of consideration, is the question of how we best *love one another as a community and family, and our neighbors*. For example, will our actions as a church put undue pressure on members of our community to make unwise decisions, and how might our actions help or harm our neighbors and communities in terms of increasing or decreasing the spread of the virus.

These are but a sampling of the how we are approaching the issue of "re-opening" Calvin Church for in person corporate worship and other activities.

I understand that we may have had it in our minds that once the government restrictions were lifted enough, and regulations allowed us to gather again, we would immediately do so. And I understand that some of us may be deeply disappointed that this in all likelihood is not the case. But it is important that we all understand the considerations and discernment that we must make beyond what may be allowed.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, the Apostle Paul writes (quoting, and then responding to, what he has heard some in the Corinthian church asserting), “*‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.*”

Freedom, for us a Christians, is never about what we are allowed to do, but it is always about what we are able and called to do for the sake of others. This is the guiding principle for us, as we navigate Calvin Church’s response to the circumstances of this pandemic.

Again, I write this not to disappoint, but rather to remind us all (myself included, for my heart aches every Sunday we are not able to gather together) that we are commanded to a deeper calling and responsibility than just what is allowed or what might be good for some. We are called to love one another and our neighbors in how we love God, *and* we are to love God in how we love one another and our neighbors.

I again ask you to keep this committee in your prayers, that we may discern rightly, compassionately, and faithfully.

May you be a blessing, and may you be blessed.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Kevin