

## Update for 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020

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Most of you will be aware of the new Government guidelines, allowing churches to re-open for services with certain safety measures in place from 4<sup>th</sup> July.

We are really missing meeting together to connect, worship, learn and pray with one another and can't wait for the day when we can do this again. So, when the Government announced that they were lifting restrictions on church services, we cheered!

Our task now, is to think through scenarios so that we can proceed at a safe pace. Our aim is to bring the best from digital and relational connectivity, listening to guidelines and putting safety at the centre of all we do.

Our priority is to ensure that we keep everyone safe, that we are COVID-secure, putting in place the best practices for hygiene, social distancing and responsible activities.

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The advice, from Vineyard Churches, is to take a phased approach to returning to gathered Sundays. Broadly speaking, activities could be added at each phase, building up to normal operations, in time. Taking small steps forward, is still taking steps forward.

So, to outline some of the guidelines we are working with:

1. **Social distancing can be reduced to 1m but continues to be a requirement** – in our building, with this in place, we could gather 24 people in the main hall. This restriction alone means that, for the time being we will not be in a position to gather at the VC for Sunday Services. *But, potentially, we would be able to bring together small groups of people for prayer, teaching and encouragement.*
2. **Sung Worship** is unlikely to be possible for some time, due to the nature of how particles are dispersed into the air when singing. Similar guidelines refer to shouting and speaking in unison.  
Worship is one of the core values we hold dear and so to not be able to sing together is a hard one for some of us to swallow. *We will be looking at how we can better continue to engage in worship together without gathering to do it.*
3. **Passing an offering basket** is high risk and is to be avoided. Cash is especially important to avoid due to the high level of potential cross-contamination. *For this reason, we are introducing 'text' giving to enable people to give spontaneously as well as to set up planned-giving online as before.*
4. **Administering communion** will be challenging and requires theological and practical thought. We have yet to work out the details of this in a communal setting, *but we really encourage you to take communion online in your groups, and as families, where you can. When Jesus introduced Communion, he used bread and wine because it was readily available in most homes at the time. So, use what you have available – it is simply a symbol of his body and his blood as a reminder of the sacrifice Jesus made for us.*
5. **Serving refreshments** is high risk in terms of physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning and so will be avoided at this stage in any gatherings.
6. **Small Groups** can meet safely outside (up to six households, bubbling). We would like to take full advantage of this during the summer months and encourage you to gather with

people for walks, picnics, open air prayer, conversation and games. The beauty of ChurchSuite is that we all have each other's contact details and can pick up the phone and call, set up WhatsApp groups and communicate.

There are opportunities here to connect with people on the fringes of the church and invite them to small gatherings in your gardens or in public places. We will provide COVID secure guidelines for you to implement at these gatherings in due course.

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## To Summarise

The long and short of it is that, for the time being, we will continue to provide online services on Sundays to enable us to gather as an online community. Our Tech Team (Carl, Luke and Chloe) have been working hard to provide these services since the end of March and so will be taking a well-needed break during August (as will Andrew and myself), but we are pre-recording two services which will be streamed on YouTube on 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August and we will resume weekly services from 6<sup>th</sup> September.

Our Tech Teams will be crucial from September. We will need at least two teams of three people to cover (alternating weeks). This is the only Sunday ministry team we will need until we are back to full services, so, if you are healthy (not self-isolating) and are able to use a laptop, camcorder or other software, please would you consider volunteering for this team? You would be part of the small team who are able to gather and have a part to play in 'streaming' with us from the Vineyard Centre. Or, maybe you can help with editing talks for use in the live streams? Please get in touch with me or Carl if you can help. We will keep you updated as soon as we hear when we can meet in other ways.

These changes can be unsettling and, understandably, many of us are feeling a sense of grief over not being able to get back to meeting as 'normal'. It's important to grieve, but then we need to look up, seek God's wisdom and heart and move forwards with Him.

Early on in the lockdown, there was a stream of pictures and scriptures brought to us from all sorts of people. Many of them were saying similar things and I want to share some of these with you now as I believe that God is speaking to us. Each of them is from a different source. Open this pdf to read them and be encouraged.