



May 13, 2020

Dear Northside Family:

I wanted to write and continue to encourage you as we face together the unprecedented crisis brought upon us all by the coronavirus pandemic. This crisis has changed the world as we know it, from health care to education and from our work to our worship. We all know fellow church and family members who have been diagnosed with and continue to battle the coronavirus. We likewise know many people who have lost jobs or had their school year interrupted or ended. Many people are feeling increasingly isolated and alone. So, it is important that we continue to reach out and communicate our love and affection and prayers as we journey forward together. May our great God bless and keep us under His constant care.

As most of you know, we are seeing many states, counties and cities begin to “open up” in terms of retail businesses, restaurants and other venues, with accompanying regulations and recommendations. This, of course, raises the question as to when is the right time for churches to resume in-person worship services and other activities. Because of First Amendment issues, very few of our national, state or local regulations and recommendations officially and directly address the situation of churches. Nevertheless, as pastors and church leaders, we are seeking for our congregation to adhere to secular regulations and recommendations as much as possible, because “we are all in this together.”

We have had some good success livestreaming our Sunday morning and Wednesday night services. Many Sunday School classes and Bible Study groups are using Zoom and other media to meet online. Our church has made an effort to engage our community and church in special projects, like providing lunches to the Boddie Community, meals to our local hospital workers and, this past weekend, delivering Mother’s Day gifts to mothers who are members of our church. And there have been many other unseen acts of kindness and ministry carried out by our members and ministers. Thanks to everyone for your prayers and patience as we have continued to be the church while sheltering in place.

I wanted to announce some upcoming in-person opportunities we are offering during the latter part of this month of May. These are “first step” events which will hope will be a blessing and also teach us how to better move forward in the days ahead:

Sunday, May 24 Drive-In Memorial Day Services at 9:30 and 10:45 a.m. Our church will have access to an FM radio transmitter and will host two short drive-in services on the back parking area and along the south side of our sanctuary. We encourage you to decorate your car in patriotic colors and come with your family. You will be required to stay in your car for the 35 to 40 minute service and listen to the service via a transmitted FM station.

Sunday, May 31, Outdoor Service at 10:30 a.m. The church will have chairs set up next to the ballfields and sloping down toward the Thrive building. You can bring your own chairs as well. We will be setting up at the required social distance of six feet between family groups or individuals. We will have one 45-50 minute service that day.

For both of the above worship experiences, it is important that you know that the buildings (including the bathrooms) will not be open. (This is one reason for the services being short!) It is also important for you to know that if you are sick, or have compromised health, please stay home. If you are aged 65 or older, the Georgia governor has recommended that you continue to shelter in place at home through June 12. We will be livestreaming these events for those who cannot attend. Other rules and recommendations will be stressed to the congregation the week prior to each event. In the case of rain, both of these events will be cancelled, but we will still produce a livestream service.

On Monday night, June 1, at 6:30 p.m., our deacons and ministers will assess how these two events went, with a view to resuming indoor in-person worship services in June. (You should have received by now a survey as to whether you would attend a worship service in June. If not, please contact our church office.) When we do resume worship, we will offer both a contemporary service at 9:30 a.m. in the Thrive building and a traditional service at 10:45 a.m. in the Sanctuary. These services will be livestreamed. Other services may be needed to accommodate social distancing and safety recommendations.

As soon as we make a decision, we will let you know the first date for an indoor in-person worship service. It is possible that we may have one as early as June 14. It is also possible that we may have to delay further, given the ever-changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic. Please pray for our church ministers and leaders in this time of decision. Proverbs 15:22 (NIV) says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers, they will succeed." And Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) says, "Commit to the Lord, whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Most of all, please remember the great promise God made to Jeremiah:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." - Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

God has a plan for our country, our county and for our church. He will reveal his plan to us in time. And when we follow his plan, we will succeed.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you during these challenging days. It is a joy to serve with such godly and capable church staff, leaders and members. *I love you all!*

Dr. Owen Bozeman
Transitional Pastor
Northside Baptist Church