

May 13, 2020

Dear Morgan Hill Bible Church:

God is at work in churches all across the South Bay during this unique time. While we have had to close our physical campuses, the Church is not closed, and that is true at MHBC!

Changes are happening almost daily in California. Gov. Newsom has eased some of the stay-at-home restrictions allowing certain businesses to reopen. State and country officials have also outlined plans for further regathering, including certain public health milestones related to community incidence rates of COVID-19. While we don't have specific steps for regathering yet, we wanted to use this letter to give you the framework for how we are making decisions to move forward.

Some churches have called for the state to allow in-person religious gatherings to resume, and others have announced plans to reopen within a few weeks. While these churches may gather using considerations specific to them, and while it's easy in our current cultural climate for people to assume a partisan perspective, we wanted you to know the four major points we're considering as we continue to evaluate when and how to regather at the campus of MHBC in the months ahead:

Consideration 1: Our Mission and Witness to Outsiders.

As we work through this global disruption, we continue to pursue "connecting people into vital relationship with Jesus Christ." For over 30 years, that has been the heartbeat of MHBC. We envision the culture of our valley tipped toward Jesus, and we derive that missional heartbeat directly from the instructions of Jesus to be making disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). That will not change. Even people who have historically wanted nothing to do with "the church" are looking at us right now, and we want our decision-making process on physically regathering on our campus to be thoughtful and prayerful enough that even

outsiders are compelled to consider the Jesus we follow. We hope our choice to move through a process of regathering at a thoughtful pace will be a reflection to the outside world of the thoughtfulness of our faith in Jesus.

Consideration 2: Your Health and the Health of our Valley.

We care deeply about human life because we agree with Jesus that every person has infinite worth and is created in the image of God. We are listening to medical professionals and government officials to understand best practices for group gatherings in the midst of a pandemic. While we are continuously learning more about COVID-19 and understand that there are differences of opinion, we are not confident at this time that large-group gatherings involving the traditional elements of Christian worship are safe for individuals or the broader communities in which we live. We continue to monitor this concern, and we look forward to making alternative decisions in the future as circumstances shift.

Consideration 3: Biblical Authority.

As of the writing of this letter, the State of California continues to order the closure of large-group gatherings at churches, dine-in restaurants, bars, nightclubs, movie theaters, gyms, sports venues, etc. It is our best understanding of the New Testament Scriptures that we are repeatedly instructed to submit ourselves to our governing authorities unless they order us to do something that violates our faith. While we are concerned about our constitutional liberties, given that churches are not being singled out for closure, we do not feel that our governing officials have asked us in any way to violate our faith in Jesus or change our mission. To honor the teachings of Jesus and Scripture, we believe we should continue to submit ourselves to the orders of the State of California. Please reference the following Scripture passages: Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-17; Titus 3:1-2.

Consideration 4: Practicalities of Gathering.

We truly miss physically gathering together. In deciding the logistics in the hope of regathering, we are seeking to do so in a way that honors our mission,

testimony, and God's authority over us while addressing the expectations and limitations particular to MHBC. Just because we can meet, doesn't mean we will...at least right away. We miss the conversations, the laughs, the reverent and rowdy times of worship. We miss the fellowship around coffee and donut holes! We miss seeing our kids learning about Jesus together and running around our playground on campus. Unfortunately, at present, we are unable to offer an experience anything like what we are used to at our physical campus. We can't encourage people to gather and linger and mingle over a cup of coffee. We long for the day when this changes, but the weekend experience we could offer at the moment would not feel very much like what we all miss.

For all of those reasons, based on what we know right now, our campus (not our church) remains closed for the time being. We do not anticipate returning for large worship gatherings until we can ensure a safe and positive experience for our attendees, volunteers, and staff. We anticipate that the first of incremental steps will be encouraging and facilitating small group gatherings of children, students, and adults for Bible study and worship while following protocols for health and safety. We are anticipating further guidance about safeguards that should be in place for gathering in the future. By the way, we are grateful for the cleaning supplies you've provided us as we prepare for a future campus opening.

However, Morgan Hill Bible Church is more than a building or a campus. We are "open" even while our physical campus remains closed for large gatherings. MHBC remains open because so many of you, our volunteers, along with staff and pastors continue to serve! We are gathering hundreds weekly to our livestream and midweek devotional. Established small groups, along with new and open groups are meeting on Zoom to study God's word and pray together. Students are live-streaming and MH Kids programming is being shared online with our families. Every single one of our ministry teams is learning and growing through this time, eagerly considering new strategies that will allow us to best serve our congregation and community through this season and beyond.

In addition, we are thankful. So many of you—our partners and regular attenders—have continued to give generously and even sacrificially through this unprecedented time. Not only have you supported our ongoing ministries, but you've also gone above and beyond in contributing to our Benevolence Fund that has enabled us to bless families in our community who are facing hardships due to loss of income. Our Help Team formed during the crisis is helping to meet physical needs (shopping, meals, etc.) and regularly checking in on seniors in our community.

Now, maybe more than ever, we have opportunities to demonstrate the love of Jesus in serving alongside one another. When we are able to gather, we are going to need almost two times the volunteers to create welcoming and safe environments that care for the physical, relational, and spiritual needs of those who gather. Whether hosting people on our courtyard and parking lots, in our meeting spaces, serving on a sanitation team, serving our next generation in MH Students and Kids, we are going to need all hands on deck! Will you please pray about how you and your family might serve others when our opportunity comes to gather?

Thank you for your continued prayers and encouragement! We are grateful that we can rest and put our hope not on what we know but Whom we know: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Sincerely,

David Whitaker, Lead Pastor
for the Elders