

## **Reimagining Re-entry for Covenant Christian Community Church**

### ***Imagining a Post Pandemic Future***

It is remarkable how much things can change in such a short period of time. On Sunday, March 15 we encouraged you to stay home from church as a way of doing our part to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19. By Sunday March 22, the option of gathering in person was removed. Over the past two months many of us have mastered technology that previously seemed impossible. And we have become conversant in language that was foreign to most of us. (Be honest, did you know what a Zoom meeting was?)

This pandemic season has been marked with difficult losses as a church family - staff has been without employment, we had to cancel our spaghetti dinner, our 40th Anniversary celebrations will be starting (at least) online, and our VBS (as it has normally operated) has been cancelled.

We have, however, gained some special things during this time. Our online gatherings have extended our Covenant family - welcoming some who haven't attended in some time and others who are too far away to gather with us in person regularly. Newly gained technological skill has allowed many of us to connect with distant family and friends in ways we haven't in years (or ever!). And our appreciation of the value of being together has, I believe, risen.

We are looking forward to being able to be together in person again, however we have no idea when and how that will be possible. What we can be fairly certain of is that "re-opening" of our region and our province will be staged. Large gatherings - or gatherings with a good number of people in a smaller space - will likely be one of the last things to resume. While we aren't a large church, it is likely we will not be able to go "back to the way things were" quickly. Due to restrictions that may be mandated and our emotional responses to this pandemic, we actually may not be able to go "back to the way things were" at all.

While we grieve the loss of the comfort and freedom we once had, I would like to invite us to prayerfully imagine what God might be leading us into as we look to the days ahead - both through re-entry and beyond. The heart of our Christian gospel is the resurrection - new, previously unimaginable life emerging from the throes of death. I would like us to dream together. What resurrection life might God be inviting us into as we emerge from this pandemic reality? Our world has been changing for a long time. COVID-19 has accelerated that change. What should we look like as a church family in the emerging new world?

### **Parametres for Imagining Our Future**

As we dream about what should and could be, we don't do so with a blank slate. There are two sets of parametres that create the framework to guide our imagining:

1. Internal Identity
2. External Constraints

## Internal Identity

What things look like in the future is built upon how God has led us so far during our forty year history. We are a church that has, for forty years, sought to *meet people where they are and walk with them*. On our website we speak our identity this way:

*We are a family of people who are following Jesus together trying to live by his new commandment - LOVE ONE ANOTHER.*

In our efforts to do that we have three areas of focus:

- *Beloved* - To show and share the overwhelming free love of God as embodied in Jesus and to actively invite people to join us in receiving and walking in this way of love and life.
- *Belong* - Create spaces, large and small, in which relationships can be formed, belonging found, and each person can be known and cared for.
- *Become* - Walk alongside each other as we learn and grow into all that God has created and freed us to be in Christ.

In 2018 we adopted the following strategic initiatives as a five year plan:

- *We will be a community church for our community* - We believe that the hope of Jesus is hope for the entire world and are committed to growing as Jesus followers and intentionally engaging our community with a posture of listening, service, and invitation.
- *We will be a church committed to next generations* - We believe that the greatest need and the greatest opportunity for long term impact is to invest in younger generations - children, youth, and young adults - and that this investment will open many doors through which we can serve our broader community.
- *We will steward our building and property in ways that welcome and serve our community broadly and next generations specifically.* - We believe that a facility does not save people, but that by investing in our facility and property in ways that reflect initiatives #1 and #2, our space can be an amazing tool to demonstrate and share the love of Jesus - who does save people.

This identity and these areas of focus and initiative provide us with our internal framework that should shape us as we look to the future. But that is only one side of the equation. The other is the external constraints.

## External Constraints

During the process of re-entry there will likely be government constraints which will need to be met. These will likely include (but not be limited to) limitations on numbers, sanitizing guidelines, and social distancing protocol. Churches in Germany, for example, have begun to

reopen with those restrictions, a requirement for all worshipers to wear masks, and a ban on singing.

Additionally we need to consider ethical constraints - constraints not imposed on us from anyone outside, but that we consider important as we seek to honour and care for the most vulnerable in our community. If we're allowed to gather how can we do so in a way that will protect those who are immunocompromised, workers in essential services, and caregivers of those who are vulnerable? What guidelines should we adopt and how do we ensure they are followed?

### *Imagining Our Future*

It is essential for us to acknowledge that things will not - they cannot - be like they were before. For some of us just reading that sparks a deep sense of grief or even anxiety in us. We need to recognize that and honour that loss. But we also must look ahead to what is to come and some of us are energized by the process of dreaming and imagining where God may be leading us. My hope is that we can come together - with both sadness over what we are losing and excitement about where God may be taking us - to talk about what could be and what God might be leading us into. I'm excited that we can take ownership of that future together.

We are receiving guidelines from the Be In Christ Church of Canada and we are committed to respecting our national, provincial, and local authorities. But we need to hear from you. We invite you to pray the following prayer. And then, work through the Reimagining Re-entry Exercise as we seek to discern what God might be leading us into as we move through this pandemic into his life for us on the other side.

*Lord God. I often struggle with change - at least change that is imposed on me. It is so easy for me to default to what is comfortable, known, and easy. A huge part of me just wants this "cup to pass from me." And yet the example of Jesus invites me to pray, "nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." As I consider these questions, may I be open to the Spirit of God in me. May I be open handed with my preferences, humble with my posture, sensitive with my words, and active with my listening. And as our voices come together in an effort to discern yours, may your hearts be filled with excitement knowing that you are a resurrection God and life to the full awaits those who enter into it!*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in Covenant Christian Community Church, in the universal church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21 adapted)*

## Reimagining Re-entry Exercise

- Below are three levels of constraints. For *each*, you are invited to dream about how we can creatively embody our identity, speak and live our areas of focus, and enact our strategic plan.
- We invite you to dream as it relates to three ministry areas - adults, youth, and children. Our identity, areas of focus, and strategic plan impact each of these. So do the constraints! Recognize that these ministry areas don't operate in isolation. While the dream of what could and should be needs to take each of them into account, it will not necessarily be three unique dreams. This grid may be helpful to guide your thinking.

	Children	Youth	Adults
BELOVED			
BELONG			
BECOME			

- Feel free to imagine as much or as little detail as you would like. And feel free to focus on a specific area(s) that are of the most interest to you (e.g. ministering to children, adapting our space and volunteers to ensure safety for people as they come in, leveraging online ministry).
- Remember . . . the goal of this exercise is not to plan for how we can “get back to normal.” It is to dream of where God may be leading us in a post pandemic future. To help us get there, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:
  - What we have gained that we may want to hold on to?
  - What were we not doing well before this that we need to focus on improving (e.g. small groups, evangelism (specifically sharing the invitation of Jesus with others, diverse contributions in our gatherings)?
  - What would have been helpful to have in place before this started?
  - What we are currently missing that would most help us be who God has called us to be based on our identity, areas of focus, and our strategic plan?

### Scenario #1

- Religious gatherings are re-opened, but are limited to 50 people.
- Masks are encouraged in these gatherings.
- Social distancing (2m) is encouraged.
- Singing is discouraged in these gatherings.
- Handwashing or hand sanitizer stations are mandatory.
- We maintain our current access to run online options - with the option of more (e.g. availability of online courses - EHS, Alpha, financial management courses, prayer)
- Financially we are running at 70-75% of our originally estimated budget.

In this scenario, what can we do well to embody our identity, speak and live our areas of focus, and enact our strategic plan?

## **Scenario #2**

- Religious gatherings are re-opened, but are limited to 100 people.
- Masks are encouraged in these gatherings.
- Social distancing (2m) is encouraged.
- Handwashing or hand sanitizer stations are mandatory.
- We maintain our current access to run online options - with the option of more (e.g. availability of online courses - EHS, Alpha, financial management courses, prayer)
- Financially we are running at 95-100% of our originally estimated budget.

In this scenario, what can we do well to embody our identity, speak and live our areas of focus, and enact our strategic plan?

## **Scenario #3**

- Religious gatherings are re-opened.
- Masks are encouraged in these gatherings.
- Social distancing (2m) is encouraged.
- Handwashing or hand sanitizer stations are mandatory.
- We maintain our current access to run online options - with the option of more (e.g. availability of online courses - EHS, Alpha, financial management courses, prayer)
- Financially we are running at 115-120% of our originally estimated budget.

In this scenario, what can we do well to embody our identity, speak and live our areas of focus, and enact our strategic plan?

## **NEXT STEPS:**

If you have taken the time to prayerfully consider these questions, we invite you to join us for a Zoom meeting on Thursday from 7:30 to 8:30 pm. In this gathering, we will discuss the things that have been coming to mind and continuing our dreaming in community. The discussion from this gathering will be shared with our board as we consider to serve our Covenant family and discern where God may be leading us through this time.

The Zoom meeting will be at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81874599945>. Or open Zoom and enter Meeting ID: 818 7459 9945. To join by phone call 1 647 558 0588. To participate in this Zoom meeting you will need to use the password: 147609. (This extra level of security is standard for all newly scheduled Zoom meetings.)

If you cannot participate in the Zoom gathering, but would like to share your responses to these scenarios with the board, please email them to [jon@covenantchurch.ca](mailto:jon@covenantchurch.ca).

Please recognize that this is an exercise in discerning where God may be leading us. This is not a vote or even a poll. Each contribution is valuable regardless of how many of any one person's ideas are acted on. Thanks for your participation in this process!