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Dear Celebration Assembly Family and Friends,

Like many of you, I have been watching and praying as the events of the past few months with the COVID-19 illness have gone on. It has truly hurt and troubled my heart to have not been able to meet physically with our church body during this time—I have said many times during this pandemic that the church cannot be bottled up or shut in, and that is Truth! The church is living and active, just like our God! It was not meant to be confined to a building, so it is not defeat to be separated for a time, if we continue to seek the Lord and grow personally in our walk and relationship with Him.

The Bible does say that in the last days, there will be times of uncertainty, plagues (pandemics), and a great shaking, but that those who continue to abide in Jesus will be strong. God promises to **redeem** all things, and I believe He has used this time to “separate” many of us to Him, to seek Him more in prayer and intercession, and to provide many of us additional time and the burden to go deeper in our relationship with Him in the Word.

With that acknowledged, I also pray that we are people of great faith and courage. As we are now able to begin returning to the processes and schedules of daily life, I am excited to be able to meet again physically for services in our church building! I feel there is something powerful when we are able to “not forsake our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 12). I believe we are encouraged and built up in faith when we can corporately worship, pray, and grow together, and I am excited to begin that practice again!

With that said, I am excited to announce that our church will have our Grand Re-Opening Celebration service on Sunday, May 31st. It is especially fitting that on our calendar, May 31st is Pentecost Sunday, when the early church launched with a sense of boldness and unity after Jesus’ resurrection!

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The Board and I have met, prayed, and asked God for wisdom and to “grant us a treasure of common sense...” (Proverbs 2:7). Although we do trust and believe God is in control, we also know that we live in a world where sickness and pain exist. Regardless of how careful we are, the risk of exposure is still “out there”. Yes, we could catch an illness at church, but we can also catch it at the grocery store, Menards, Target, work, or any public place where many of us go daily. The important thing is that we put precautions in place to be safe, sanitary, and wise, but trust God without a “spirit of fear”.

As believers, we must act with compassion, understanding, and show care for those who are sick or are at risk for illness. With that in mind, we ask that everyone ***please carefully read the following precautionary steps and the attached sheet which lays out the steps our church is taking to clean and provide the safest environment possible for our members.***

1. If you or an immediate family member have experienced ***any symptoms of any*** illness in the 24 hours leading up to service, you need to stay home, rest and recover, and seek medical attention. Even if you feel it is a minor symptom, please consider that others with lower immune systems or who are older may be at risk. Our online service will still be posted online for those who are sick or for those who are at a high risk who may choose to stay home for a while longer.
2. Wash your hands regularly, use hand sanitizer (there will be bottles available for use at service), and practice good health hygiene (sneeze into tissues or the corner of your arm, then wash your hands immediately). Please respect that during this time when concern is high for the spread of illness that others may not have your comfort level for interaction. We need to be kind, loving, and unified in peace...please do not judge the precautions others take (such as wearing or not wearing a mask)! You may be unaware of their specific medical needs or of circumstances in their lives that require them to be cautious.
3. Pray for others who are ill and for the virus to stop. If you are unable to attend, due to illness or because you are at high risk for illness, you are always welcome to contact the church office or a small group leader or Board member to request prayer. As always, a recording of the message is available upon request, and the attached sheet will give instruction on how to continue participating in the online services.

Should things change, please stay connected via our Facebook page; we will provide updates as needed.

God is Good and In Control,

Rev. Craig Ellefsen