



Emmanuel Family,

I am writing to you in our 3rd month since the pandemic began to disrupt the pattern of life for everyone on the planet. I have to tell you, that God is still good and I can see His faithfulness when I look at how the people of Emmanuel have resolved to lean in and be the love of God to each other and the cities where we are planted. I can't help but be grateful knowing that God gave me the treasured assignment to serve as the Lead Pastor at Emmanuel!

It's not a mistake that you and I are living in this moment as connected members of the church and it's very important for all of us to lean in and follow the direction of the Spirit. Listening for the whisper of the Spirit is more difficult in a season like this when emotionally charged conversations and painful experiences are everywhere.

In Revelation chapters 2 & 3, Jesus speaks to 7 individual churches (churches of Ephesus, Philadelphia, Laodicea, etc.). Each time Jesus speaks and gives instructions, he concludes with this phrase, "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches." In other words, each church has to lean in and listen to what God is saying to their church. Emmanuel, we don't need to follow what God is saying to other churches, we must listen to what the Spirit is saying to our church!

What are we doing now?

I believe that we are already following the direction of the Spirit to gather online each weekend and in groups throughout the week. God is faithfully meeting with us in thousands of locations. We have honored the state of Minnesota's public health expectation to stay home. Since the Stay at Home order ended this past Monday, we now have the additional freedom to gather in person with groups of 10 or less. We encourage you to take advantage of this freedom as you feel comfortable!

I was surprised by the Governor's announcement of the phases of re-entry that the state will be allowing on June 1. Why was I surprised? For the previous six weeks we have participated in a group with pastors in Minnesota who were invited to meet with the Governor to assist in the re-entry plans for churches. We submitted research that covered practical, responsible protocols for the churches to follow that would meet every standard that businesses and organizations are utilizing to open safely. Collectively, we were led to believe that these protocols would be utilized in the state's process for a gradual, phased-

in re-opening of churches over weeks and months to come. I was surprised because none of the plans or recommendations were included in the Governor's approach for the next three phases that were introduced in the press conference. I am saddened by the reality that churches are not trusted to foster safe environments and the ministry that we provide is not recognized as important to the people making decisions for the people of Minnesota.

I am a pastor to the entirety of Emmanuel, including the vulnerable and hurting. We have stories of people who are in our church presently dealing with the pain and grief of loved ones who have fallen victim to the very real devastation caused by the COVID-19 virus. I care about each one and am conscious that the decisions we make have a ripple effect through several communities. We also have local partners; leaders in law enforcement and hospitals who we want to retain positive relationships for the long-term future. When I make decisions, I must remember everyone but follow the Spirit.

So, here is what we will do over the next few weeks:

1. Continue to worship and meet online every week!
2. Gather in groups of less than 10 in homes and online.
3. I am calling for FASTING AND PRAYER church-wide beginning today through May 31st, which is Pentecost Sunday. I understand that many have Memorial Day weekend plans for eating, etc. I don't want to interrupt your plans but I do want to ask you to pray. Pray that God will give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to Emmanuel! Pray that God will heal the sick, provide safety for the healthy, wisdom for leadership and that we will see people come to Jesus.
4. Guard your heart and minds. We support our sister churches around us, some who are choosing to re-open in defiance of the Governor's orders and others who are staying closed. We don't need to all choose the same course of action and the enemy would love to pit churches against each other. Our battle is not against flesh and blood.
5. When we hear clearly from the Lord AFTER fasting and praying, our church leadership is committed to doing what the Lord is calling us to do next! In the meantime, we are prepared and ready to host both on-campus and online church.

In summary, we are going to walk humbly and listen for the voice of the Spirit. All of our ministries continue to be available online and we are ready to resume on-campus ministry when the time is right and we feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We will not be bullied or silenced by the spirit of the age, and we will not react out of the flesh by doing anything that the Lord is not directing us to do.

Together in the harvest,
Pastor Nate
Lead Pastor

