

# RESUMING GATHERED IN-PERSON WORSHIP

## STEP ONE



ASHLAND  
CHURCH

Be patient!

This is just the beginning of our plan to resume 'in-person' gatherings for corporate worship. We plan to continually modify our format over the next few months.

If the Lord tarries, we will have many more years of ministry together. Moving through this time together should only strengthen our fellowship in the mission to make disciples of all nations.

I am fairly certain, like it or not, our lives are being altered in significant ways for an extended time. However, I'm guessing it won't always look like this.

Rest assured your staff and church leaders feel the weight of responsibility before us. We deeply love this church. The details of the decisions before us have all been considered with our church family's best interest and commitment to the gospel at the forefront of our minds.

## **GUARD YOUR HEART**

Please read the following Scripture and consider each of these principles and how you will personally live them out as we move toward in-person gatherings as a church.

*This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

*- Ephesians 3:6*

### **A Gospel Opportunity**

Differences about how we should resume in-person gathering provide Satan with a great opportunity to destroy our church. We, however, must see it as an opportunity to display gospel unity in our church. Remember the gospel doesn't alleviate our differences. The gospel binds us together despite our differences. The power of Jesus is most vividly on display in the church when we choose to be united in His gospel instead of being divided by our differences. Remember this is spiritual warfare. Cling to the gospel. In doing so we'll be clinging to one another!

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*- Philippians 2:4*

### **Consider Others**

For weeks we have been inundated with plenty of information about our current crisis. We all evaluate this information from very different perspectives. Some

hear warnings and immediately worry about their own health. Others are most concerned with the safety of their loved ones. Many are frustrated by the economic effects on their personal businesses or the companies for which they work. Some have lost their jobs. Others have sunk into a deep depression from isolation. We have plenty of young adults who have missed graduations and are still reeling from the loss of athletic opportunities over the last few months.

If we are truly a family, we must be mindful of each of our brothers and sister's unique perspective. Take a moment to try and consider the vantage point from which others in our church family see and feel the current crisis. Then choose to take specific steps to not only think of others but to serve those who see things from a very different perspective than your own.

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

*- Proverbs 16:18-19*

### **Reject Pride**

While we are all encouraged to think, formulate, discuss, and even have healthy debates over the issues before us. It is foolish pride for any of us to claim we have an inside track on all that has and is going on or what the future holds. To be cavalier with our views at this moment lacks grace and love for our fellow brothers and sisters.

*Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

*- Romans 14:4*

### **Avoid Legalism**

Over the last nine weeks, we have been given many rules and guidelines for health and safety. The nature in which the guidance has been given has caused us to develop personal convictions over the health and safety of others. Understand this is not necessarily a bad thing. However, moving forward in unity will require all of us to guard our hearts against condemning others who do not share our exact same convictions. Please strive to refrain from a judgmental attitude that evaluates and condemns others' actions.

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

*- 1 Corinthians 10:31*

### **Do What You Do for God's Glory**

The gospel cleanses our conscience of all guilt before God. In Christ, this reality is true at all times. We must strive to live our lives free from the condemnation of God's judgment.

At this time, we are all making many really important decisions. We are responsible to make these decisions before God. We will not all make the same decision. However, we must all be encouraged to choose the best format for worship and fellowship free from guilt and condemnation in Jesus.

We have tried to give as many options as possible. Choose what's best for you and your family and live with a clear conscience before God. Just do whatever you do to the glory of God!

## **PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR DECISION TO RESUME IN-PERSON GATHERING**

*24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

*- Hebrews 10:24-25*

### **Biblical Call to Assemble**

Assembling isn't just something we like or want to do. It's what the Bible calls us to do. It's actually what the church is in essence, an assembly. Throughout history, the church has suffered greatly to meet together as a collective witness in the world. Despite the difficulty our current crisis presents we must work to resume this practice as a church body because it's a practice of who we are and what we are called to do.

*37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

*- Matthew 22:37-39*

### **Love for Neighbor**

We want to consider the dangers of what has been called a worldwide pandemic. While we may have differing opinions about the severity of this health crisis, we must consider the warnings about mass gatherings. With so much conflicting information the best approach is usually a more cautious approach. For this reason - to love our neighbor - we will strive to be reasonable and not reckless.

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*

*- Romans 13:1*

### **Respect for Government**

At this point, we have not felt as if our government has been unreasonable. Our government has never said that Christianity is illegal. They have not banned the preaching of the gospel. They have even encouraged worship and preaching of the gospel through virtual means. If we ever felt that the government was unreasonable, or if we were asked to never meet again as a church, we would have already chosen to violate such prohibitions.

For this time we have thought it wise for the sake of the gospel to respect our government officials and not meet in-person for worship. We believe according to the Scriptures that God has placed governing officials in power to establish order. For this reason, we intend to continue to not only respect our governmental leaders we will also continue to pray more earnestly for their good!

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. - 1 Timothy 2:1-4*

Going forward we want to be reminded of two important realities. Firstly, and most importantly, Jesus Christ is our ultimate authority. We obey Jesus as King by His Spirit according to what He has clearly revealed in the Scripture.

Secondly, we must remember that we still have constitutional rights that allow us certain freedoms to make decisions about practicing our religion. The government may request or suggest certain guidelines, and as a church we have a responsibility to consider such requests with utmost concern and respect. We also have the liberty to make specific decisions about the practice of our religion. This is the truth: we have brothers and sisters around the world who live without such freedoms and thrive as believers. However, at this time, the freedoms we enjoy as Americans are an important reality that we must not lose sight of as Christians.

# WORSHIP SERVICE

## SUNDAY 10:00 AM

### 3 Venues for Worship

- In the Building
  - Worship Area
  - Overflow Area (see Figure 1)

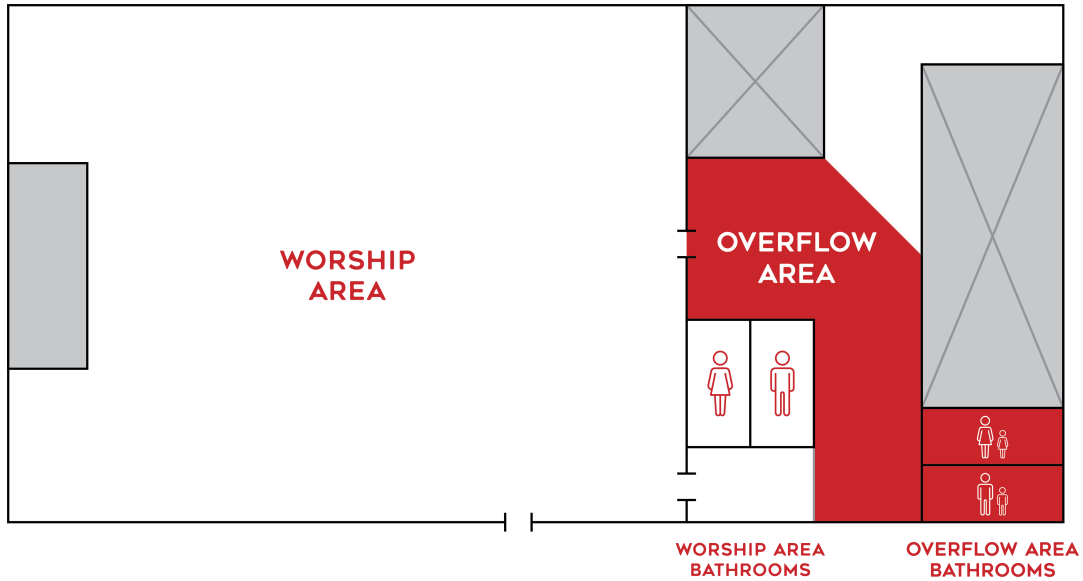


Figure 1

- In Parking Lot
  - A section in our parking lot will be reserved for cars to park (see Figure 2) and listen to the service through your radio (there will not be any speakers/screens outside - you can also livestream the service from your personal device). This allows you to see and interact with one another from your car.
  - Car Radio Frequency - 89.5 FM



Figure 2

- At Home
  - Live-Stream
    - Website - [www.ashland.church/live](http://www.ashland.church/live)
    - Facebook - [www.facebook.com/ashlandmc](http://www.facebook.com/ashlandmc)
    - YouTube - Search "Ashland Church Media"
    - Twitch - [www.twitch.tv/ashland\\_church](http://www.twitch.tv/ashland_church)
    - Twitter - [www.twitter.com/ashland\\_church](http://www.twitter.com/ashland_church)

### **Personal Responsibility**

Each person has a responsibility to look out for the welfare of others. From the CDC, symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms or combinations of symptoms may have COVID-19 and should avoid gathering with the church for 14 days following the onset of symptoms:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Or at least two of these symptoms:

- |                                |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Fever                        | • Headache                   |
| • Chills                       | • Sore throat                |
| • Repeated shaking with chills | • New loss of taste or smell |
| • Muscle pain                  |                              |

Those considered "vulnerable" should use their own discretion. Vulnerable populations, as defined by the CDC, include but are not limited to: Individuals 65 years and older. Individuals with serious underlying health conditions including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised (such as by chemotherapy or cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy)

We encourage the CDC guidelines for social distancing which call for maintaining 6 ft of distance between individuals.

While most of our ministry team leaders will wear face masks, they are not required of everyone who attends.

As you use the restrooms make sure to thoroughly wash your hands. While our bathrooms will be open, let's do our best to keep bathroom use to a minimum at this time.

Please take advantage of the many hand sanitizer stations throughout the building.

You must sit with your family unit, roommates, or persons you've quarantined with in your home or households.

### **Building**

The building is being cleaned with the highest standards for sanitation.

- Professionals will sanitize the chairs after each service.
- We ask that everyone enter and exit the building via the double doors in the back lot
- All doors will remain open so that you will not need to touch a door handle.
- The building's roof vents will remain open to circulate air out of the building.
- Bathrooms will be sanitized before the service, during the worship time, and after service.
- We will eliminate as many flat surfaces as possible
- We will not be serving food/refreshments at this time

### **Seating**

We have 300 seats separated in units that are 6 ft to 12 ft apart. The chairs are arranged to allow for family units to remain together.

The open area in our Ashland Kids section of the building will be set up for overflow in case the main area reaches capacity. Or for families with kids to utilize at any time before or during the service. There will be screens set up for you to watch and participate in the service live. The doors will be open so you'll still see into the main area. We ask everyone in this area to maintain social distance between families.

### **Worship**

We will seek to participate in our "normal" liturgy and practices in each service. The services will be approximately one hour long. There will be a kid's element in each service. and children will remain with parents. The greeting time will be replaced by a congregational prayer time. We are planning to eventually partake communion safely.

### **Arrival & Dismissal**

We recommend that you arrive early and get to your seats. Each family will decide when they want to leave. We will not dismiss in rows but we must maintain orderliness and social distance as we are dismissed from the building.

### **Fellowship**

We do encourage you to interact with folks seated around you. We encourage you to engage in conversation as you social distance.



## **FAMILIES**

### **Children**

For the next few weeks, we will not have Ashland Kids during the worship service. We plan to slowly work this in as things begin to reopen. Families should feel free to bring their kids to church for worship. However, children will need to remain with their parents at all times.

### **Family Engagement**

We encourage every family to remain engaged in this time. Be creative as parents as you display for your kids the priority of the local church. We pray that all our families will be represented in some way each week.

## **SMALL GROUPS**

Our annual summer schedule encourages BFGs to take a break. However, given the last few months of quarantine, this summer we encourage BFGs to meet as much as possible.

On May 22nd, there will be new public guidelines allowing groups of 10 or less to meet. We will leave much of the discretion up to each BFG about the implications of these guidelines for your particular group. However, we believe that in-person small group gatherings within BFGs should begin to take place in June.

We suggest that some meetings be gender-specific to minimize numbers and to help with kids. Outdoor venues will be ideal for summer fellowship opportunities. We only ask that every leader thoroughly communicate expectations about the format for each gathering.

## **MEN'S MINISTRY**

### **June**

Small groups of 8-10 men within BFGs or other groups are encouraged to gather for fellowship

### **July**

Church-wide BAM event

## **WOMEN MINISTRY**

### **June**

Small groups of 5-8 women will gather. Each group leader will use great discernment and clarity in communicating fellowship guidelines.

### **July**

T2W gathering at the church.

**ASHLAND STUDENTS** and **ASHLAND COLLEGE** should follow these same schedules in June and July