

Dear LaGrave Congregation,

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, LaGrave's council and staff are hard at work wrestling with the challenges ahead. The challenges are many and questions abound. Questions like: Can we do baptisms in a pandemic? How do we install new office bearers? What about professions of faith? How do we do weddings? What about funerals? How can Bob do youth ministry over the summer? When can we convene small Bible studies? When will church services start again?

That last question is the one we hear most of all. We all miss church services. We all miss seeing each other. We long for the day where we are all together in a packed church, singing our favorite hymns at the top of our lungs.

But while we all share this destination, we all imagine different paths to that happy place. There are some in our congregation who want us to open immediately, there are some who want us to wait indefinitely, and there are many who hold some position in between those two poles.

Council is working hard to establish a sensible re-opening plan. We've gathered information from many experts and sources. Here are some of the steps we've taken:

- We've convened special meetings of the council and the executive committee.
- We've agreed upon a set of Biblical principles and philosophical guidelines that will ground our decision making. A document attached to this email lays out those principles and guidelines.
- We've created a team of advisors who have expertise in medicine, public health, and policy making.
- We've gathered articles and sample policies from the Christian Reformed Church, the CDC, other local churches, and many other sources, all of them offering advice about how churches might proceed.

Although we have no specific timeline for re-opening, some inescapable realities will shape any policies we make. Those include.

- Covid poses a greater risk for older people, the poor, and folks with existing conditions that compromise their health.
- Congregational singing is a high-risk behavior.
- Some of the worst examples of community spread have occurred in church choirs.
- Any re-opening will start small and proceed in careful phases.
- Virtually every plan we've seen includes using masks in worship during the initial re-opening phases.
- Any plan we make will have to be flexible. The situation changes week by week.

We have not set any firm dates for a return to activities. Smaller groups will likely convene first. Those gatherings will probably include social distancing, hygiene procedures, mask guidelines and other constraints.

Thank you for your patience. These are anxious times. Please pray for us as we make these difficult decisions. Please continue to reach out to one another through cards, calls and other forms of communication. May the Lord continue to guide and strengthen our church family.