



July 7, 2020

Sisters and brothers of Ardmore Baptist Church:

Not long ago I was grabbing some of our weekly groceries at Publix. I was abiding by social-distancing guidelines and was wearing my mask. As I was walking down the canned vegetable aisle, I saw somebody that looked like a member of Ardmore, but with a mask it was hard to tell! However, as I got closer I realized that it was indeed who I thought it was. I said their name and they turned around. I had not seen this person since our last in-person worship service on Sunday, March 8. We both had to tell one another that we were smiling under our masks and we both said that we wish we could hug one another. We stood in the aisle for a few minutes just catching up. It did my heart so much good to see this person.

You are probably like me and deeply miss being together. And I know that there is a growing call for churches like Ardmore Baptist Church to begin to re-open for in-person worship services. I want you to know that the members of the *ABC Re-Opening Team* are asking themselves are diligently working to ensure that we move forward in the wisest way possible for our church.

Weeks ago, I wrote to you that the *Re-Opening Team* made the decision that, based on the Governor's 3-Phase Re-Opening Plan, we would not feel comfortable moving forward with in-person worship until North Carolina was in Phase 3. We were hopeful that Phase 3 would come at the end of June or early July, but due to increasing Covid-19 case numbers in our state, Phase 3 was delayed for a few additional weeks. As you ask questions about when Ardmore Baptist Church will resume some form of in-person worship, I wanted to simply offer a reminder that our *Re-Opening Team* has made the decision to wait until Phase 3 before resuming in-person worship.

Just as a reminder, I laid out what Phase 3 looks like statewide according the Governor's reopening plans and some specifics of how this may look at Ardmore Baptist Church:

Phase 3 (4-6 weeks after Phase 2):

- Lessen restrictions on vulnerable populations, but encourage continuation of safe-distancing practices.
- Allow increased capacity at small businesses, entertainment venues, and places for group gatherings.
- Continue rigorous restrictions on nursing homes and congregate care settings.

Phase 3 at Ardmore Baptist Church:

- Begin the process of allowing congregational-wide meetings to take place. It is unknown at this time what that may look like, but it will most likely involve:
 - Safe-distancing practiced in the Sanctuary
 - Limited numbers in the Sanctuary for each service
 - The continuation of offering a livestream option for worship
- The Church Office will hopefully open back up completely during Phase 3.
- An increase in the number of SBS classes and special studies that meet at the church.

There is still so much that is unknown at this time, but it is believed that Governor Cooper's office will be providing an updated timeline next week as to when North Carolina may be able to expect to move towards Phase 3. Our *ABC Re-Opening Team* is having a meeting on **Wednesday, July 15** to discuss the state of Covid-19 numbers in our community and to reassess our own plans in light of news we may receive from the Governor's office. Please be in prayer for the *ABC Re-Opening Team* as we seek to discern God's wisdom and will for

Ardmore Baptist Church. As way of reminder, the members of that team are: Gina Brock, Courtney Cash, Alan Gill, Leslie Hege, Mac Jones, Jeff McIntyre, Tyler Tankersley, and Franklin Watkins.

I also want to remind you that while we have suspended in-person worship, *Church* has never been canceled.

- We continue to hold meaningful online worship services every Sunday. You can watch the service live at 8:15 AM on YouTube or at 10:45 AM on Facebook. If you do not have access to either of those, please call the church office so that we can help provide you with a CD or DVD of worship: (336) 725-8767.
- Our various ministry areas continue to engage in their important and formational work of discipleship. We have weekly opportunities for children, youth, college students, and adults of all ages. Additionally, our hospitality, missions, administrative, and music ministries are remaining as active as ever. If you need help with a place to plug in, please contact us.
- Ardmore Baptist Church has simply amazed me with its continual generosity even during this pandemic. Our church remains financially healthy and that is due to the sustained stewardship of the congregation. You can continue to mail in your tithes and offerings to the church office or to give online by going here: [Online Giving](#).

For the past few months I have been preaching through Paul's Letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 5:13-15, Paul reminds the Galatians (and us) that we do not practice our faith in a vacuum, but in community:

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

I know that these continued restrictions are painful on us all. We desperately wish to be back in church with one another, singing our beloved hymns, embracing our sisters and brothers, and worshipping in our beautiful sanctuary. However, if we take our faith seriously and if we believe that love of neighbor is at the heart of who we are as Christians, then how our behavior affects those around us should guide us in all that we do. While these restrictions are difficult, they continue to demonstrate our love of God and love of one another.

Right before the church member and I parted ways in Publix, I felt the need to say something. The guilt of not having in-person worship services can be overwhelming for pastors in the midst of these days. I said to them, "I am so sorry that we have not been able to gather for worship." The church member looked at me and as tears filled her eyes she said, "Pastor, we never stopped worshipping."

Peace,



Rev. Tyler Tankersley