

**Salinas Valley Community Church
COVID-19 Congregational Update
May 27, 2020**

Dear Salinas Valley Community Church Family,

It has now been over two months since the Shelter-In-Place order was given by the State of California and Monterey County officials. Life has certainly changed since that moment for all of us. Since that day, the Pastors, support staff and senior leadership of SVCC have been praying for the whole of our congregation. We know that some of you have suffered serious consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of you have been impacted by job losses, possible illness and/or prolonged isolation from those you would love to hug. We know that fear, stress, anxiety, frustration and depression are real things that you might be feeling. We have all learned that life is unpredictable and that we really have little control over our circumstances. But we also know that God is in control and He alone has ultimate dominion over our circumstances. We hope you are as encouraged as we are by the constant reminders we see of God's love being poured out: the countless acts of service being provided from neighbor to neighbor; the first responders who so selflessly put their lives in harms way in response to real human suffering; the generosity of strangers; and the hope we have that this is not the end of everything, in fact, it is the beginning of a new day. Yes, it will be different from the old days, but just as affirming of human dignity and God's goodness.

We thought it might be a good time to update you on all on what is currently happening in the life of our church and what we have planned as we begin to look to the future.

Current Operation

We could not be prouder of our pastors and staff. With little warning, they were plunged into a new reality that required them to move quickly and creatively. Mark, Paul, Mike and Joel have all responded to the call and we owe them a great debt of gratitude. They moved seamlessly into live online worship services so we could continue to meet as a body. A special note of thanks goes out to Tom Armstrong and his tech team for the truly outstanding work they have done...thanks Tom and team! The worship teams have provided great comfort to us all as they gathered and created amazing worship for us. We have upgraded the ways we can communicate with you to include: major upgrades to our website (thank you Katie Stover!) and social media presence; production of the Daily Devo; and online meetings for Awana and other various groups that usually met on campus. We will continue with our online services into the future while we look for additional ways to grow our outreach and impact. The pastors have provided great care and comfort to many of you and we as a congregation through our Jerusalem Fund, have helped many people in real and tangible ways. Our church is really God's church (it always has been and always will be) and we are blessed to know that in crises, His church continues to reflect Christ's love to all.

The Future

The way forward at this point is unknown but we are beginning to plan for the day when onsite activities can be safely held again. To this end, we have assembled a team of people made up of elders, pastors and lay leaders whose mission is to develop the plan for the day we can regather on our campus. The team is called “Chapter 3” and is made up of Shelley Berg, Nancy Beymer, Ryan Cornelsen, Terry Espinoza, Matt Fleming, Jim Fletcher, Rae Gularte, Doug Huckins, Barbara Mejia, Tim Reece, Paul Richards and Mark Simmons. The Chapter 3 team has begun regular ZOOM meetings and is charged with developing the plan, process, procedures, phases, timing, protocols and implementation strategies that will be necessary and critical if we are going to re-open our campus in a safe and responsible way. This team will provide the congregation with regular, ongoing updates through the SVCC Web Site.

If you spend much time on social media, you know there are many opinions on how and when to begin opening churches back up. We respect that there will be different opinions on the matter. We understand that some members of our congregation feel strongly we should open quickly and go back to normal while others urge a much more careful and cautious approach. We know we cannot please everyone with the path we choose. Ultimately, this is not a political or spiritual decision; it is a health and safety decision for us to make. Therefore, you should know that the focus of this team is to set clear and measurable standards for re-opening that are fully compliant and respectful of all CDC, Federal, State and local mandates for public safety. Even though the State of California Department of Public Health recently published their highly restrictive recommendations for what steps churches must take to open on a reduced and limited basis, SVCC will err on the side of being cautious and careful. We have a congregational makeup that is skewed towards the elderly and we have a significant responsibility for our staff and children. Next week, you will receive a questionnaire which we hope you will take the time to respond to. Knowing exactly how our congregation feels about the issues surrounding the re-opening effort will help guide the Chapter 3 team as it moves forward. The Chapter 3 team will make its recommendations to the Board of Elders, who will make the ultimate decision on how and when we re-open our campus to services and other activities.

What can you do to help? **Pray** - First and foremost, you can pray for our pastors and staff who bear the biggest burden in continuing forward. Pray for our church and our people. Pray also for our newly commissioned Chapter 3 team. Pray for wisdom, guidance and unity as this team plans for our future.

- Be patient - We know being patient is a hard thing to do now as we are all eager to return to the way of life we know.
- Be positive - Look for the small yet beautiful ways that God is moving in our lives and focus on that.
- Be affirming –It is easy to focus on the negative during difficult times. Instead, look for ways to lift people up and encourage people in all things.
- Be gentle – Resist the temptation to magnify differences. Instead, look for ways to foster harmony.
- Be kind – Go out of your way to express the kindness of God to others. We pray that our community would see God’s immense love in how we treat others.

- Be faithful – continue to give to the church as you are able. We promise to be faithful stewards of God’s provision.
- Be courageous – Live your faith out in plain view for our faith does not call us to be timid...it calls us to be people of courage.
- Be thankful – even though times are strange and difficult for us all, remember we are a totally blessed people.

Conclusion

There is no doubt these are unique days. None of us living have ever experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. One day, we will tell our children and grandchildren of these days that include not only hardship, but also God’s immense faithfulness. Our hope is that we will turn what evil seeks to destroy into stories of human kindness and dignity that affirm all we know about God - that His love is everlasting; that His grace is sufficient for all; that all people matter to God; and that His plan and provision is enough.

May you be Blessed and content as the Lord has not forgotten you!

May God Bless SVCC and you all,

Jim Fletcher for the Chapter 3 Team