

Dear Calvary Church Family:

As most of you know, on May 19th, Premier Ford announced further opening of Ontario's economy. Premier Ford rolled out a three stage process in helping our province reopen. Each stage will take two to four weeks to implement and complete. The government's [framework](#) set out a number of criteria for beginning to phase out restrictions on businesses and gatherings. (***You can check those out by clicking on the blue "framework" above.***)

Since May 19th Premier Ford has pushed back the state of emergency to June 30th. However, has given the go ahead for parking lot services for faith groups. While I was excited at the prospect of being together in some way as a family, I was also circumspect, knowing that the framework with it's guidelines would probably be restrictive and vague. After being able to participate in a Zoom video call with 71 clergy from Hamilton and Niagara and after reading the guidelines, I was reminded again of two things: 1) Our communities are beginning to open up slowly, and 2) Life is not returning to "the way it was" any time soon.

I'm sure that if you read the guidelines or a summary of them, some of you were hopeful, and others were concerned (or perhaps you lacked an opinion) regarding gathering in a parking lot. Whatever your response may have been, all of us, in different ways are learning to adapt to life as isolation is lifted slowly. This adjustment includes our Calvary Church family.

After digesting current provincial guidelines with other ministry leaders throughout Niagara and our team of Elders, we have decided it is best, not to gather in a parking lot service. The guidelines to faith-based organizations mandated to meet are neither sensible nor realistic. (e.g., ***"not being able to get out of your car,"; "not being able to pass communion or other materials out"; and the practical; having kids in the car for a period of time, not being able to use the buildings restrooms and also excluding much of our church population***). We find these and other restrictions too much for OUR church environment. Therefore, we will not be participating in parking lot services.

I know there will be questions regarding our decision, but I can't answer each question that you might pose, in a letter like this. There were too many issues that had to be weighed to explain our decision. For us, no doubt, the government and the health and safety of our own people and community had a substantial impact on our decision-making process. We want to faithfully and biblically submit to our "governing authorities" over us (**Rom. 13:1-7**).

We as an Eldership team also want to be clear, that our provincial government has not forbidden us to meet as faith communities. Therefore, we intend to live joyfully and be helpful citizens in our community and promote peace rather than division. Our desire is

that we as a church and as christians model Christ in the best way possible. To do otherwise could bring dishonour to the name of Jesus. However, to submit with a joyful heart, could bring favour, as we seek to model Christ and serve our community of St. Catharine's.

Allow me, just for a moment, to turn the conversation away from what we have lost, to what we might gain into the future. There have been some questions floating around in my mind over the past few weeks. Questions that I have been asking myself about an UNSTOPPABLE FUTURE.

- 1) On the surface it appears we have lost so much, but what if there are actually new opportunities headed our way?
- 2) What if we invested our time, money and talents into these new doors of opportunity that God is opening up, instead of complaining about the doors that have been closed, which is out of our control?
- 3) What if trying to pry open the doors God has closed, keeps us from seeing the new doors?
- 4) Could it be that God might be allowing some doors too close because they hindered the church?
- 5) What if we need to agree that the church, including Calvary, was losing ground even before COVID 19?
- 6) What if the younger generation left the church, not because they were rejecting Jesus, but because the church was more worried about about themselves than the fame of Jesus and his incredible passion for the world?
- 7) What if we as at the church need to adapt in new ways to reach a world with God's amazing truth?
- 8) What if we are on the verge of something epic, yet, we can't see it because we are so worried about what we have lost, then what God has in store?

I hope I am not boring you with these questions, but making you think about the possibilities God has for us as a universal church and a local church that we and others call Calvary. Many of us have questions about how we need to live during this unprecedented time, I have questions too, however, let me also say, they never taught us in seminary how to shepherd during a global pandemic.

During this time may I make some further observations that might help. There's no doubt that during this period of time God's people need to assemble in person in some way. (**Acts 2:42; 4:31; 12:12; 20:7; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11:17-34; 14:23,26; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:2**) However, I will say, that the mode of gathering has looked different at different times through the centuries. No building existed to worship in, until the third century. For over 200 years the church would gather in homes. (**and I am not making an argument for house churches per se**) However, I want to remind us, that today, I have seen the church more flexible, organic and resilient than we have given her credit for.

As someone who has come accustomed to gardening, I see the church as not a fragile orchid, but a strong unrelenting dandelion that grows where not much else can and we don't die easily. Therefore, please hear me say; while we don't have all the answers and in some cases, we are not sure what to do, let's press into God, led by the Holy Spirit, who has promised to be our refuge and our rock and focus on the mission that God has called us to. **(Matthew 28:18-20)**

That is what I have been trying to do and what our staff and leadership have been trying to do the last three months. God is giving us all this time to recalibrate. To find our North Star, Jesus Christ, and to mold and shape us for this new journey.

I believe that this journey that WE are ALL in, will make us stronger and even more committed as a church family. To create and craft new ideas that will open doors that we have never seen before. It will also, make us think through the best way to re-gather under the provincial guidelines and still be the church that God wants us to be.

We have more opportunities than ever before, to bring the good news of Jesus to our community at large and to the world. Decisions are difficult, but we believe God has in store for us, more than a return to "normal" life. We will keep you in the know, of Calvary's re-entry plan in the weeks to come. We want to be READY to gather!

We love and miss you all.

Pastor Craig
on behalf of the staff and Elder leadership