

Earlier this week the [provincial government announced some significant news regarding the province's re-opening](#). In addition to increasing the limit on social gatherings to 10 or less as of Friday, places of worship have also been given permission to gather in their buildings up to 30% capacity starting this weekend. Obviously, this has many people in church circles talking, and certainly has us asking a number of questions.

Firstly, as a leadership, we're thrilled with the opportunity to now safely gather in social groups of 10 or less. While continuing to honour physical distancing, this means most of our staff departmental teams can now connect in-person. And even more importantly, many of our Life Groups can now connect face-to-face, and perhaps even get together during the Sunday morning online service to leverage the "house church" dynamics of community. These have always been critical to our lifestyle of connection and can be leveraged now more than ever. Stay tuned for more vision and encouragement from our Connection Team about this in this weekend's service!

Secondly, while we're excited to be able to group to a greater degree now, we're still very cautious to gather in our church buildings in larger sizes, even despite the new permissions. Not only would our services be limited—not just in numbers but also in scale (no nursery, Kid's Ministry, or café, for example)—but the need to uphold physical distancing would make the warmth of reuniting each week feel somewhat awkward. Add to that, we haven't received any provincial guidelines regarding the increased cleaning and sanitization protocols that would be required, nor are we clear on whether people indoors (like at grocery stores) would be required to wear masks or even be allowed to sing together.

So, for at least the month of June (if not for some time still), we won't be opening our church facilities for weekend services. We're hoping that, for the most part, people can leverage the house church feel of connecting as Life Groups—

even or especially during the Sunday morning service—or continue to experience our online service at a time that’s convenient for you from the safety and comfort of your home.

We know that our online service is a far cry from the experience of actually gathering together in person and exercising our faith at our “spiritual gymnasium” together. But we also know that the dynamics of opening soon would be a similarly far cry from the full experience of worshipping in community, and in light of the rigors it would require, does not seem worth it to our leadership to risk peoples’ health and safety—or exclude those whose health and safety is under greater risk—for such a minimalized experience at this time.

So, we really hope you’ll make the most of your Life Group in this season and hope as many groups as possible can gather to experience the Sunday service together. For groups that are larger than 10, you may want to consider subdividing into a couple smaller groups. Or, if you’re not in a Life Group but would like to explore opportunities to connect with others from Southridge in a 10 person or less format, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

And in the midst of this increased grouping while still not fully gathering, we hope it will whet our collective appetite for when it does seem safe and reasonable for us to be together in a larger way again, fully enjoying being together as Southridge locations.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to dialogue with myself or any member of our Leadership Team or Board of Elders. We’re so proud of all the ways you have continued to *be* the church even though we haven’t been able to *gather as a church* through this unprecedented season!

Cheers, Jeff