Congregational Update July 17, 2020

Dear Bethel Family,

It’s been a season of many changes and we trust you are doing well despite all that is going on. Though the changes may not yet be finished, we can be confident as we face the future knowing that God has been faithful, is faithful, and will continue to be faithful regardless of what happens!

We’d like to update you about Sunday services and some of the things behind the scenes at Bethel. Although we can’t meet together in quite the same way, life does continue to move along!

***Sunday Services***

As we hope you already know, we have started meeting again in person for Sunday Service on July 12th! We have two groups meeting on alternating weeks so that we can gather safely under the 50 person limit given by the government. We will try a few different formats through the summer and aim to have a plan put together in August for what September will look like. Please let us know the things you appreciate as well as suggestions for how things can be improved!

The re-opening process is complex and we ask for your patience and grace as we try different things to see what works best. The safety of our congregation is paramount, as is the reputation of Jesus in the community and we want to be cautious as we comply with Provincial health orders and care for our congregants while also presenting a good witness those who see us gather.

***How Long Will Things Be Different?***

Dr. Bonnie Henry has been clear in stating that the 50 person limit will not be lifted until we have a working vaccine for COVID-19. While none of us here at Bethel have inside information on the progress of the vaccine, it is very likely that a vaccine will not be available for *at least one year.* This means church life will look significantly different until September, 2021 and perhaps longer.

While it is hard for us to change so many things that have been so meaningful for so long, we don’t give up hope! The church is not the building, not the service, and not the time, and neither is God limited in how he can move. This is an opportunity for us to ask good but difficult questions around what it means to be the church, what it means to worship, and how God wants to move in our individual and collective lives. God has a hope and a future for Bethel and this is a time for us to listen well to the voice of His Spirit and where He is leading us.

***Giving***

Our donations are running a little behind last year and behind budget for this year. In the first 25 weeks of 2020, undesignated giving was $111,576 compared to 2019 which was $116,045. For 2020, our undesignated giving is running $12,400 below budget, in total, for the first 25 weeks of the year. Giving often slows down in the summer, however we are hopeful for a bounce-back in the next several weeks.

We want to thank all of you for the support we have received in this very different time in history. Giving of our natural gifts, time and monies, is a form of worship and we have an awesome God that is worthy of all this worship.

***Staffing***

Pastor Jon has returned to full time hours at the beginning of July which has been helpful as we return to both online and in-person services as well as prepare for the fall. Pastor Jon will be taking three weeks of vacation to go camping with his family starting on July 27th and we are blessed to have a number of people from Bethel who will be preaching while he is gone.

We were thankful to receive two Canada Summer Job grants which allowed us to hire Dan and Aleah each for 8 weeks at 35 hours per week. They have both worked hard every week to serve our church family and the community in a variety of ways! Aleah will finish her 8 weeks at the end of July and Dan will finish his on August 21st. They will both take some well earned vacation at the end of each of their contracts.

Returning to in-person services has generated a significant amount of administration and Linda has done a great job getting us up to speed with policies, paperwork, and infrastructure while also keeping up with the regular demands of her role. She will be taking vacation periodically throughout the summer.

As before, the church office remains open on weekdays during the summer from 9:00 – 2:00 every day but Tuesday.

***Freedom Mobile***

Freedom installed the cell phone antenna back in March - June. We have some concerns around deficiencies, most of which are to do with the shroud on top of our roof. We are continuing to work with them to have these deficiencies rectified. Their rental payments commenced in the month of March. The rental proceeds were to be considered for “specific ministries or activities” sometime in the future, and are not going into operating revenues. We will make a proposal on this sometime in the future.

***Genuine Learning Academy (GLA)***

GLA is behind in their rent but has advised that they will catch their payments up by August. They have paid the security deposit. We have advised that we need to have the rent payments caught up in order to renew the lease. We will bring a new lease for 2020-21 to the congregation for ratification when we can. At that time, we will ask for authorization from the congregation for Executive/Ministerial to renew the lease on an annual basis, going out for the next 3 years.

***Becoming a Society/New Constitution and Bylaws***

To become a Society, we need a new Constitution, Bylaws and Guidelines. We want to become a Society for the following reasons:

1. Forming a society is a step taken by us as members to take greater responsibility for the life of Bethel.
2. It affords our church members legal protection against any liability claims that might ever be made in the future. As it stands now, individual members of this church can be held personally liable for liability claims that may arise in the future. As a Society, individual Directors and members are not liable;
3. We have had legal advice that it would be prudent for us to do this;
4. CCCC also recommend it for the same reasons;
5. Many other churches have taken this step;
6. If we become a society, we can begin a process to acquire title to our church back from MCBC;
7. We know that many members of our congregation feel very strongly that we need to do this and are not willing to continue to be exposed to legal liability claims that may arise in the future;
8. Finally, and very importantly, our church has changed significantly over the past 20 years and we feel we need a revised structure to reflect our current make-up.

We wish to emphasize that forming a Society does not have anything to do with the question of our relationship with MCBC - that is a separate issue.

Executive and Ministerial have been continuing work on a draft of the new constitution and bylaws. We are hopeful that we can commence a discussion with the congregation in September about the new Constitution, Bylaws and Guidelines, leading to a congregational vote sometime after discussion and feedback from the congregation throughout the Fall

We look forward to future discussion with the congregation in the Fall.

***Church Leadership***

This has been a strange time for us all and we’ve had to adapt how church leadership has been done over the past couple of months. Executive and Ministerial as well as Combined Council have met both separately and together on several occasions to continue discussions on how to respond to COVID-19, how to reach out to the community, and how to proceed with the constitution and bylaws. Many of the meetings were Zoom meetings and some were in person at the Church.

The church staff meets weekly for a socially distant staff meeting to coordinate different details and to pray. There is still a great deal of transition going on as we continue to adjust how we operate, and we are blessed as a church to have so many dedicated and godly people who have been willing to serve in this way.

Finally, we would ask that you continue to intentionally spend time with God and with His people. Worship and prayer remind us who God is and keep us from feeling overwhelmed with the world, and time with the Church reminds us that we don’t go through this alone. Jesus has promised never to leave us, never to forsake us, and to be faithful to every one of his promises. Let us be a Church family who daily follows Jesus wherever He leads.

In Christ, and in your service,

Jon Reesor, Lead Pastor

Terry Christie, Congregational Chair