



# Yountville Community Church COVID-19 Returning Plans

*Church isn't closed, it's just different.*

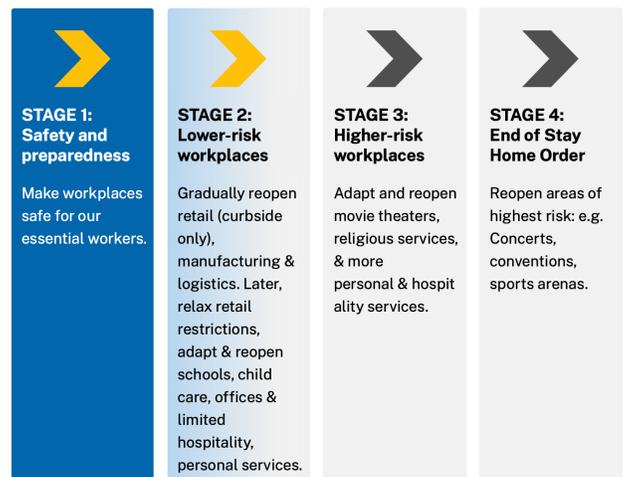
1 June, 2020

Dear Church Family,

The word of 2020 must certainly be *'unprecedented'*. With the arrival of a new respiratory illness called coronavirus, the United States (and the whole world) has been thrust into a pandemic response unlike anything we have ever known. From shelter in place orders for much of the world, schools and offices closed, food shortages and hoarding, to unemployment levels not seen since the Depression, this year has brought unprecedented challenges for us as a society, and as a church. Rightly we pause today to mourn and lament the deaths of more than 100,000 Americans due to the coronavirus.

In accordance with state and county public health guidelines, Yountville Community Church paused our physical gatherings and implemented a COVID-19 Emergency Operations Plan beginning Sunday 15 March, 2020. Our strategy during the shelter in place (SIP) has included: posting pre-recorded church services online, as well as weekly Kids Church video messages; mailing paper sermon and prayer notes to those without internet access; and holding prayer meetings, Bible Studies and Christianity Explored courses on Zoom. Our Pastoral and Discipleship Care Plan also assigned each church member to the care of one of our leaders. **With all this ministry going on, our church is by no means closed!** We pray you have felt well cared for during this unusual season.

In managing our response to the COVID-19 situation, we have closely followed both the State of California's ['Roadmap for Resilience'](#) and Napa County's ['Recovery Roadmap'](#). According to the roadmap, churches would not be permitted to open until Stage 3, and only *with adaptations*. On Saturday 25 May the state government published their [Industry Guidance for Places of Worship](#). (In somewhat of a surprise, late on Thursday 28 May Napa County issued a modification of their roadmap to allow for the reopening of places of worship in Stage 2.)



With these guidelines in hand, the Elder Board met at 3:30pm on Tuesday 26 May to formalize the returning plans for Yountville Community Church. After much discussion, consideration of the particular factors affecting our situation, and prayer, the Elder Board unanimously approved the following resolution: **that Yountville Community Church suspend physical gatherings until we can meet together in the renovated Yount Street complex.**

The reality is, this decision might postpone our reunion until October or later. We have all been looking forward to returning to church and meeting together face to face, and so we understand that this decision will cause disappointment for many. However, when we weighed all the factors, there was only one option that best fit our particular circumstances.

This document is designed to help you understand the thinking process behind the decision; to give you access to the documents that have shaped our deliberations; and to ask for your support during this unprecedented season for our church.

With much prayer, I believe that this season can be one of growth for us as individuals and as a church. I pray that you will take this time to stretch yourself into new ways of thinking, being and doing with regards to your faith in Jesus. It will be some time before the world returns to 'normal', and much like the post-911 era, the new 'normal' will likely look much different to the world we knew. As a church family, I ask that we embrace these changes for the sake of the gospel and so that we do not hinder what God is doing; that we embrace innovation as we try new ways to grow ourselves and others as disciples; and that we embrace one another (metaphorically anyway!) as the church family that we need to be in order to weather this storm.

Imagine we came to the other side of the COVID-19 crisis stronger, more dedicated to God, more in love with Jesus, and more connected to one another than we were before... That's what I'm praying God might do amongst us in the coming months.

Yours in love and faithful service,

Dan Bidwell, *Senior Pastor*

John MacDonald, *Elder*

Robert White, *Elder*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 3:20-21



## Factors Contributing to the Decision

### 1) Where to meet:

- **The Lincoln Theater** has been closed during the SIP, and has no scheduled events before November, according to their FaceBook. The Theater is situated in the federally-controlled grounds of the Veteran Home, which has been closed to visitors since 15 March.
- **6619 Yount St Meeting Room** (formerly the garage) is approximately 470sq. ft. Under physical distancing guidelines, this room could hold a maximum of 13 people. There is only 1 restroom available, which would need to be sanitized between every use.
- **6619 Yount St Yard**. We considered hiring a marquee tent to hold outdoor services during summer. The rental cost is high; creates noise pollution on Sundays; still only 1 restroom; site needs improving for safe access and child safety; not wheelchair friendly. Use of this backyard for church services could also be a conflict with the prior negotiated use permit with the city of Yountville.
- **Other off-site options** are prohibitive due to requirements for setting up for Sunday services according to COVID-safe guidelines below, as well as any setup of sound, music and seating for church.

### 2) [Government guidelines for opening](#)

In considering the government guidelines, the Elder Board affirms that we are called to follow the laws of the land unless they conflict with Bible teachings. Guidelines for reopening include:

- Strict cleaning and disinfecting protocols before and after public use
- Gatherings limited to 25% of available capacity, up to groups of 100
- Physical distancing essential, indicated by tape markings, signage, and ushers
- Masks required for all staff and volunteers as well as temperature checks before serving. Masks are strongly recommended for all congregants.
- Online registration for attendance is recommended
- Children must stay with guardians i.e. no Kids Church program
- Singing is strongly discouraged
- No passing of common items e.g. collection plate, communion plates, physical brochures or handouts.
- Food service and mingling or socializing in groups in common areas is discouraged.

### 3) Other considerations particular to YCC

- Shelter in place is still the mandatory overarching order.
- High risk populations including those over the age of 65 and those with underlying health conditions are *“still recommended to... avoid crowds, mass gatherings or large events, and public transit, and stay home as much as possible.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Napa County Recovery Roadmap version 4.0, p3

- [US research in recent weeks](#) has showed that 25% of church attenders aren't sure when they would feel comfortable coming back to church. An additional 30% of respondents said they'd rather worship at home and only return when they can be mask-free at church.
- With these factors in play, we expect to continue producing online church videos into the future, even once we start gathering physically. Video production is very time-consuming and labor-intensive, as is hosting an in-person church service. We need to consider the sustainability of doing both with only one paid staff member.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1) Does this mean church is 'closed'?

No. *Church isn't closed, it's just different.* YCC has continued to provide gospel-centred ministry of prayer, preaching, Bible Studies and evangelistic outreach throughout the SIP. And we continue to do so.

### 2) Other churches are opening. Why can't we?

We long to gather again with you all. But there is no easy solution that allows us *all* to gather together under the current circumstances (outlined above).

### 3) Can we meet in homes?

No, at least not yet. Napa County has made it clear that under current the SIP order *"all public and private gatherings with those outside a person's household are prohibited."*

### 4) Can we meet in restaurants or cafes?

Not at this stage. Napa County FAQ for restaurants states: *"California is still under a Shelter At Home Order, so you should only share a table with members of your household."*

### 5) Can groups meet at 6619 Yount St?

Only under the strict guidelines for church gatherings. All use will require prior authorization from the Elder Board in writing.

### 6) What about people without internet access?

Throughout the SIP we have delivered printed sermons, prayers and prayer meeting notes to approximately 12 church households who have no access to the internet. We encourage all members to consider engaging with our online content in order to connect with YC during this new phase of ministry.

### 7) What about communion?

Communion is an expression of our unity as the body of Christ, and is best celebrated when we are physically together in fellowship. As a concession, we have shared communion as part of our monthly prayer meeting on Zoom, when we are gathered virtually in real time. Although not ideal, I believe that

communion is a sacrament of faith which we are able to partake in this manner in good conscience.<sup>2</sup>

**8) When will the Yount St construction be finished?**

We have an estimated completion date in October.

**9) What if state or county guidelines change before we move back into the Yount St complex?**

Public health authorities have been clear that we may expect loosening or tightening of restrictions in future according to the COVID risk in local areas. While we hope that small groups will be able to gather in private homes or public spaces sometime during the summer, this is not guaranteed. The Elder Board will adjust small group meeting guidelines appropriately.

**10) Will everything be 'back to normal' when we move into the Yount St complex?**

No. We expect physical distancing guidelines to be in place until California reaches Stage 4, when vaccines or effective treatments for COVID-19 are publicly available. This is unlikely before 2021 at the earliest.

**11) How can I serve at Yountville Community Church during this time?**

Remember, *church is not closed, it's just different*. During this time we ask our members: to continue attending church virtually; to be diligent in prayer for our pastor and our church; to reach out to other members with pastoral and discipleship care; to continue in financial partnership with us; to share Jesus by sharing our sermons online and on social media; and to join online Bible Study groups and prayer meetings.

**12) If I have further questions, who can I talk to?**

We will hold a church Q&A session on Zoom at 11am on Sunday 7 June. This is a chance to hear personally from the Elders and Senior Pastor. You can submit questions before the Q&A via email ([dan@yountvillechurch.org](mailto:dan@yountvillechurch.org)) or phone (707) 944-2179.

## Helpful Links

[California State Resilience Roadmap](#)

[California State Industry Guidance for Places of Worship](#)

[Napa County Recovery Roadmap](#)

[Napa Shelter at Home FAQs](#)

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<sup>2</sup> Faithful, Bible-loving Christians take different positions on this e.g. [FOR](#) / [AGAINST](#) / [UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES](#). I am currently persuaded that 'virtual' communion together is less than ideal, but afforded by faith not sight, in the same way that the centurion's son was healed by faith in Matthew 8:5-13.