

MDPC is OPENING

Slowly and Safely

open.mdpc.org

Friday, April 30, 2020

Dear MDPC Friends,

I pray you are well and adapting to the implications of faithfully following Jesus Christ during this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Monday, April 27, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference during which he unveiled the plan to reopen Texas. It appears that the emphasis on social distancing has helped to flatten the curve. That is good news, but we still must stay vigilant.

Governor Abbott introduced the reopening plan by saying that there will be a two-phase strategy to gradually allow businesses and other establishments (including churches) to move toward normal operations. This is dependent, of course, on a continued reduction in confirmed cases with the concurrence of medical, scientific and civic officials. The complete Reopening Texas can be found [here](#). To briefly summarize:

➡ Phase One (May 1-17)

Establishments may choose to open, but must have occupancy of no more than **25% of capacity**. If things continue to improve...

➡ Phase Two (Beginning May 18)

Establishments may increase to **up to 50% occupancy**, if the guidelines have not changed by that date.

Before Governor Abbott's announcement, the **MDPC's** staff and session were developing a reopening plan that we believe is faithful, appropriate, and responsible, based on the current information. We realize that there is a wide range of opinions on the issue of COVID-19 and on the strategy and timing of reopening **MDPC** for normal ministry operations. We are completely respectful of this diversity, and whether you choose to return to in-person services as soon as possible, or, choose to stay home and continue to worship with us online, know that your choice is both honorable and faithful.

Sundays, May 3 & 10

MDPC's worship services continue with [online worship services](#). Only essential staff will be on campus to lead and produce services for those Sundays. This will be true for our English, Spanish, and Portuguese language services.

Sundays, May 17 & 24

MDPC is a large and multi-faceted ministry, so we feel the need to have a couple of "soft opening" services to assess hygiene, sanitation, traffic flow, seating arrangements, and possible overflow options, in order to prepare for larger-scale community worship. The first Sunday, our plan is to invite **MDPC's** staff, session, and deacons to attend worship. The next Sunday, we plan to expand that group to also include their family members.

Sunday, May 31, is Pentecost Sunday

This is the day we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church and its empowering by the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2*). Theologically, this is the perfect day to reopen the church for corporate worship! Because May 31 is within phase two of Governor Abbott's reopening plan, we will only allow **up to 50% capacity** (if still deemed safe at that time) in our worship

spaces, and we will also continue to practice social distancing between non-family members. worshippers will be strongly encouraged to practice these personal safety guidelines:

- wear face masks while on the MDPC property
- refrain from shaking hands, hugging, or lingering for conversations in the hallways
- follow the “one-way-in” and “one-way-out” directional signs for the two main hallways leading to the Sanctuary

Additional Notes

To ensure adequate distancing, we plan to temporarily move the **8:30 AM Blended service to the Sanctuary**. The normal attendance averages about 175, and we can safely accommodate that number in our 1,200-seat sanctuary. The **9:45 Contemporary** service will remain in the Sanctuary, but we will limit the number of people to **about 600**. Safe overflow seating will be setup elsewhere on campus. The **11:15 Traditional service** can likely remain in the Sanctuary without the need for overflow seating, provided people practice social distancing and responsible hygiene. Fuente and the Brazilian congregations will follow the same plan of limiting attendance and practicing safety measures.

But **MDPC** is much more than just worship services. We also have children's, youth, and adult classes and groups that meet on campus on Sundays. We are still developing the plan to reopen these, but it is somewhat dependent on how the first few weeks of corporate worship go, and whether or not the medical and scientific data report a continued reduction in confirmed COVID-19 cases. In the meantime, most of these ministries have been incredibly innovative and have continued to meet virtually through video conferencing and teaching opportunities. **We suggest those processes continue for now.**

When will the campus open during the week?

Beginning May 4, we will gradually allow the staff to return to their offices. We will look carefully at each employee's situation and allow them the flexibility they need to protect themselves, care for children or family members, and simply lessen the time spent in public settings with other employees. But even with the full shut down, your staff has continued to expand ministry by extending care, compassion, and the love of Jesus. Some weekday events and programs will return as they can within the previously stated guidelines.

We believe that taking small incremental steps, assessing the data and our experience, and making responsible and conservative progress makes the most sense for **MDPC's** reopening.

For some of the MDPC community, returning to worship will be a very welcome change to staying home. We were created to be in community, and there is such strength and encouragement by worshipping God alongside of other followers of Jesus. If you feel comfortable to attend worship, please feel free to do so, provided you agree to practice safety measures.

But for others in the MDPC community, there remains concern and anxiety about health, safety, and personal and public responsibility. We want you to know that this is a valid viewpoint and it will be respected without question. If you would rather remain at home for a while longer, we will continue to offer our worship services online via livestream at mdpc.org, or on MDPC's app, or on either Facebook or Instagram live.

Finally, there are wonderful reasons to celebrate what God is doing in our midst, despite the unusual circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our **MDPC Food Pantry** has increased its service from an average of 200 families weekly to nearly 1,300 families weekly. Praise God for the resources to help those in our community who are food insecure. We are continuing to receive solid financial support to enable our ministries to flourish. We know the global economy is uncertain, and that many in the Houston community have been affected by the downturn, but God's faithful people seem to understand that supporting the ministry of Jesus Christ is essential during these days. For this, we are immensely grateful!

Thank you for your faithfulness to Jesus. We pray that God uses the COVID-19 experience to strengthen and expand the ministry of the Church worldwide. Let it begin here at the corner of Blalock and Memorial.

In Christ's Service Together,



Alf Halvorson
Senior Pastor

Because of the unpredictability of the virus, all of these plans are fluid and subject to change. We pledge to keep you informed of the most up-to-date information as it becomes available. Please stay tuned to open.mdpc.org for the latest news and updates. And, remember, this won't last forever!