



November 22, 2020

McFarlin family, the number of Covid-19 cases is growing very quickly in our community. Our relaunch team has heard from our medical experts that local healthcare providers and medical facilities are being seriously over-loaded. After much discussion, prayer and discernment, our relaunch team has made some difficult decisions that will affect our church community in coming weeks.

I want to tell you about those plans so that you and your family can be assured of two things: McFarlin is taking measures to respond faithfully to the pandemic situation our community is facing; and second, nothing — absolutely nothing — will stop God's people from Preparing the Way for the celebration of the Christ Child. Many of us will remember from that Christmas classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, that even though all the packages, decorations, and food were stolen, Christmas came, nevertheless. How much more are we certain that, even during the disappointment of prolonged social distancing, nothing can separate us from experiencing the strong love of God that is the very heart of Christmas!

Because of our love and respect for healthcare professionals and support staff, and because McFarlin is committed to doing our part to slow the viral spread and to safeguard the health of you — our members — your families and all of our community, we are reducing in-person encounters through church activities by immediately making these adjustments:

- We will shift all worship services to virtual platforms, with no in-person worship in the building until at least January 17, 2021.
- We will suspend all small group meetings in the building, including meetings of McFarlin people, and community and support groups until at least January 17, 2021.
- Groups that can make arrangements to meet virtually or outside of the building are encouraged to do so while still maintaining appropriate safety measures. Staff will be glad to advise groups who want to use technology to do that.

Our relaunch team reached these decisions with great care and with an awareness of the fact that we are entering a season of traditions, of gathering, of great meaning to Christians throughout the world. We know that the Advent and Christmas season are such an important time in the life of your family and in the life of our church family. We know that these decisions bring great disappointment and heart-rending sadness and we also feel that along with you. Our team will continue to monitor the data, consult with the medical community, and update our protocol as needed.

Right now, in the midst of this pandemic and at a time when our Covid-19 numbers are surging, we can bring our concerns, hurts and fears before the God who made us and who longs to care for us. We can also reach out to each other and do all we can to care for those who are most lonely or most at risk during this time of isolation and disruption.

Church, the love of Christ for everyone requires that we forego some of our most beloved traditions this year. However, your church staff, our lay leadership, Pastor Wendi, and I are committed to seeking and following the creative leading of the Holy Spirit in the coming weeks to continue to craft the best possible safe and meaningful ways to worship, celebrate, care, and connect through Advent, Christmas, and into the new year.

In fact, we are working on several alternative plans already—selections from Handel's Messiah in Nov 29 worship, Advent Festival with drive-by and drive-in components, Candlelight Carol with a twist, and we're working innovatively on Christmas Eve. Please share your ideas also—let's get creative together.

I am certain that with God's help, our McFarlin family will find deep meaning, joyous moments, and the powerful presence of God's unshakeable love as we Prepare the Way for the Light of the World revealed in Jesus, the light that neither darkness nor distance can overcome.

God is with us. Thanks be to God.

*Pastor Rockford*