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June 29, 2020

Hello First Baptist sisters and brothers,

God created today for us, and we are rejoicing with gladness! Have you experienced Christ around you and within you today? Have you been Christ to someone else today? There's still time. Look for Christ. Be Christ to someone else. It will bless your day.

It is important that we update you on decisions made concerning our beginning to regather as a church. Since our last update in early May, your Leadership Council, pastoral staff, and an advisory team that includes healthcare professionals in our church, have been communicating with each other as we have closely monitored the effects of COVID-19 on our nation, state and region. Like you, we continue to pray that the spread of the virus will slow and those that contract it will not experience severe sickness or death.

Because our church is so mission-oriented, we have been vigilant about loving our neighbors by wearing face coverings, washing our hands frequently, and keeping a safe distance from each other. We did these things as we celebrated our graduating high school seniors, distributed the materials for our children's Bible Camp that engaged nearly 200 children, and continue providing meals for our hungry neighbors each Tuesday night. Our committees continue to meet by ZOOM, Sunday School classes and small groups have had the best participation in years with ZOOM meetings, our Deacons are providing fantastic ministry by staying in touch with our resident members, and many of our senior adults are staying in touch by daily phone calls. There are many great stories of things God is doing among us. Those who have been helping to create and lead the virtual worship services thank you for your participation and the many positive remarks and actions of appreciation you share with them. More people are worshipping with us now that we are sharing our services online than before we gathered in the sanctuary last. And, your consistent generosity in your financial commitment to the ongoing mission and ministry of our church has been excellent. God is faithful, alive, and active in our congregation. We praise God for all these things!

We are aware that a few area churches have begun to regather for worship services. The number of people attending these services is very small. People are hesitant about gathering in groups, whether indoors or outdoors, even when wearing face coverings and physically distanced appropriately. This is understandable because the risk can be great. When asked about us beginning to regather for worship, many of you have expressed, "What we are doing now is good. It is not worth the risk to our people and our city for us to begin regathering right now." We hear you. Some in our church are ready to return to gathering for worship. We hear you, also.

We would all like to resume gathering to worship in our sanctuary (the word means "safe place"), but it is not a safe place for us right now. The number of positive cases, hospitalizations and deaths of people with COVID-19 is trending in the wrong direction. Therefore, we believe it is safest for our church, our neighbors, our city and our region that we not regather for worship as a congregation until this reverses. We recognize that this is frustrating to some of you and believe that all of you know how difficult a decision it is for all of us. All of us want to want to worship together in the same place. However, because we love our family of faith, we must seek to minimize the risk to you and our neighbors. We ask you to please continue praying for our leadership and congregation as we continue to provide worship services online, remain connected to each other through ZOOM Sunday School class meetings, remain faithful in our giving, and be vigilant about remaining safe and providing safety for our neighbors. May God continue to bless all of us until we meet again.

Your servants,

Bruce Lennon, *Leadership Council Chair/Transition Team*

Dr. Jan Rhyne, *Diaconate Chair*

Dr. Jim Everette, *Interim Chief of Staff*