

The following information was shared via the Chapel Chat (eNews) on 29th October 2021. It gives guidance on how the Sunday congregation of The Chapel in Te Atatu will operate in the immediate future. Each group that shares our facility will be expected to form their own policies and guidelines.

UPDATED 29th NOVEMBER – Gatherings now 25

COVID Update - Picnics and more...

As promised, as soon as possible we will be creating opportunities for meeting face-to-face, in line with the upcoming introduction of the Traffic Light process. While the timing and thresholds for the changing of the lights between **Red**, **Orange**, and **Green** is still unknown, in each of the levels we will be gathering as follows. Please note: we will not be differentiating between Vaccinated and Unvaccinated for the reasons outlined in my comment below... **From the Pastor's Desk.**



RED: We will host multiple gatherings for up to 25 people at a time. There will be opportunity to talk, to reflect, to pray, and to receive prayer. Pre-recorded messages will be available online by 10am Sunday.

ORANGE: We will host two gatherings for up to 50 people at a time. We can increase or decrease this according to demand. There will be opportunity to talk, to reflect, to worship, to pray, and to receive prayer. Messages will be recorded live and will be available online by 3pm Sunday.

GREEN: We will host a gathering for up to 100 people. Extra gatherings could be added should demand arise. There will be opportunity to talk, to reflect, to worship, to pray, and to receive prayer. Messages will be recorded live and will be available online by

3pm Sunday.

- If you are unwell, or believe you may have been exposed to the virus, please isolate until you have had a negative COVID test.
- Masks will be optional.
- Seats will be spaced for social distancing.

If you would like to meet with me (Brian) face-to-face to talk or to pray, please let me know and we can arrange a time. I have set up a temporary office in the hall, near the kitchen and I can meet you at The Chapel most days. Obviously, we will follow the required protocols around social distancing etc. We can even arrange to chat while you remain in your car... or we can do **Picnics at The Chapel!**

In the meantime:

- Your personal sense of well-being is paramount. **You must do what feels right for you.** If you need to talk, please feel free to contact me (or one of the other elders):
 - Email: brianspicer@gmail.com
 - Mobile: 022 351 2291

From the Pastor's desk

Well, there are a few things I need to share so this comment is a little longer than usual. Please bear with me.

When we went into the current 'short and sharp' lockdown we had no idea we would still be here ten weeks later. I pray it does not continue much longer. Physically, emotionally, and financially this lockdown is taking a significant toll on so many. Please pray for one another.

When we went into the first lockdown in 2020 I made the comment that,

**we are not a people of fear...
we are a people of wisdom, faith, hope, and love.**

I pray that this is still our testimony!

Extremes are, usually, dangerous! When considering sides in a debate, I usually find it helpful to ignore the extremes. Then I seek to explore and assess the information necessary for the decision I need to make. In assessing that information, I do try to take into account the various factors that might influence the perspective of the one providing the information. In all of this I try to be sensitive and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

One of the contentious issues in the early church was the consumption of 'meat offered to idols'. In Acts 15 and again in Acts 21, guidance is given that the new Gentile believers should avoid eating meat offered to idols. However, this clearly was not a 'rule for all time'. For most of us, it is unlikely to be something we even think about. However, I have a couple of friends in Australia for whom this is an issue and so, when we were preaching through 1 Corinthians, I asked the wife to preach on 1 Corinthians 8 which addresses the matter, 'Concerning food offered to idols'.

She was articulate and clear. She had absolutely no concern as to what I, or others, might eat, However, for her and her family, this was very much a conscience issue. I would be happy to discuss her reasons if you are interested, suffice to say hers was not a matter of a 'weak conscience'. Quite the opposite. They were, and still are, a couple with a very strong and real faith.

However, the pertinent points to be drawn from this passage are:

Vs 1 : We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

Vs 8 : But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

and in

Vs 9-12 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

The interesting, and at times distressing, thing that I note in the current debate around vaccination is that I have good friends, people solid in their Biblical faith in Christ, on both sides of the issue. While there are many people on both sides who are extreme in their beliefs and in the way they express those beliefs, there are also many, on both sides, whose position is well informed, clearly thought through and well-articulated.

Sadly, it is so easy to become so puffed up in the 'knowledge' we possess that we allow our differences of opinion to separate us. In doing so, we cast aside love... which builds up! We are increasingly becoming a nation divided over many issues, and some of that is unavoidable. Jesus says as much in Matthew 10:34-36. However, Paul has this to say,

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18

It is notable that the early believers stood out in society because of their love. One of the most vivid demonstrations of such love came in the face of sickness and death. John Tucker of Carey Baptist College writes of...

...the epidemics that sometimes swept through the Roman Empire. These plagues were devastating, sometimes wiping up to a third of the empire's population. Most Romans typically fled the towns and cities, ran for the hills, leaving their sick loved ones to die. Those that stayed tried to protect themselves by throwing into the streets the bodies of plague victims, some of whom were still alive. "Many diseased and dying people ... asked the pity of the passers-by."

Christian communities, by contrast, tried to care for sick families and friends. Sometimes they paid for this with their lives, but more often they were able to nurse those who were sick back to health. So, as one historian has put it, Christians out-loved and out-lived their pagan neighbours, who were often drawn towards Jesus Christ as a result.

It is one thing for us to read the stories of the early church, in Acts and Thessalonians, but if we are to see this story continue to unfold today then we must learn to love as they loved.

However, for now, we are not asking you to go into the streets to bring the sick into your homes. We are, however, expecting that we can remember to express love to all whom God draws... and for the purposes of this comment, that simply underpins why we will not exclude the unvaccinated from our gatherings.

For the sake of full disclosure, I am vax-hesitant and double-vaxed! I have never been anti-vax and, if you asked me any Sunday, I can show you proof that I have been vaccinated against all manner of things including Yellow fever, Rabies, Polio and more! (My laptop bag is also my carry-on bag when I travel so it is a great place to store my vaccination certificate. Hopefully one day I will need it again.) Some of these vaccinations offer lifetime protection. Some need a booster every year, some every 3 years, and some every 10 years.

However, I also shared some (not all) of the concerns held by those who, while being labelled anti-vax, are actually vaccine-hesitant and vaccine-cautious, or simply against this particular vaccine. To label them anti-vax is to simply dismiss their very legitimate concerns... and to dismiss them.

And therefore, in the interest of love... and contrary to what some might prefer... both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated will be fully welcome when we gather.

However... there are some points we do want to make clear:

- Whether you are vaxed or unvaxed, if you are unwell, or suspect that you have been exposed to the virus, please stay home until you have been able to secure a negative result on a COVID test. Testing and isolating is by far the best way to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Some will choose to wear masks and will be more careful to maintain a clear social distance. Others will choose not to. Please love and respect each other anyway!

We are concerned for those considered to be especially vulnerable to COVID. If this is you, please consider the risks and take whatever precautions you believe necessary.

I believe we must accept that both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated present a risk of transmission. If you are vulnerable then that risk is always significant. If you would like to talk this over with me, and/or if there is any way we can assist, please let me know.

An unvaccinated person appears to be significantly more likely to transmit the virus. However, because they are more likely to be symptomatic, they are also more likely to isolate and get tested.

It also seems that being vaccinated will significantly reduce the severity of your symptoms if you contract COVID. Therefore, it will also increase the likelihood that a vaccinated person could be infected and asymptomatic and so not realise that they need to isolate and get tested. In this situation the asymptomatic vaccinated individual would still pose a significant risk of infecting others.

Thank you for taking the time to think and pray through these issues. I pray that God may lead you by His Spirit and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

It has taken me a long time to think through the issues involved and to try to communicate it as clearly as I can. However, I am sure that you may still have questions and concerns that you would like to raise. As always, I would love to hear from you and to seek to address these as best I can.

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Please remember...

*We are not a people of Fear,
but of Wisdom, Faith, Hope and Love...
so please pray for one another!*