



## GOD'S STRENGTH IN SUFFERING: COVID-19 UPDATE

Since March 8, the saints of College Park Castleton have not gathered for worship under the direction of our local and state authorities due to ongoing risks of COVID-19. This pandemic has brought on a variety of challenges, unexpected graces, and much suffering. Our church family has experienced economic hardship, physical & emotional distress, and deep sorrow as we grieve the passing of one of our own and others unable to shelter with their loved ones. Our church is again learning how to weep with those who weep.

Amidst this great calamity, we praise the Lord for how He has remained faithful to His promises and given us strength in suffering. We rejoice as our unity remains strong in the Lord even while we've been apart. We've been encouraged through seeing families worship together, regular Sunday prayers, along with flourishing men's and women's bible studies. Furthermore, God's people are finding fresh ways to bless those in need by making masks for hospitals and congregants, providing food for health care workers, and building the Castleton Community Pantry!

Our hearts' desire is to meet together again and worship with the saints as we together long for the Day we are with our Savior and all His people forever. Over these weeks, your elders have prayed for you and sought to shepherd and support you with the love of Christ. They have also prayed for wisdom and diligently sought the Lord's guidance for how to best "gather again" while still following our governing authorities and protecting the most vulnerable among us.

On May 1, Governor Eric Holcomb announced his [BackOnTrack](#) plan to systematically reopen our state over the next few months, including updated recommendations for [places of worship](#). Under these new guidelines and continued guidance from Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett, the elders are encouraging our congregation to enter into phase one of our church's three-phase "Gather Again" plan.

### Phase 1: "Gathering Again" in Homes

Lord willing, beginning May 17, 2020, we are encouraging College Park Castleton families who would like to do so to host 1-2 additional family units (limit 10 individuals) from among our church community and neighborhoods to worship together each Sunday morning in their homes.

#### **Phase 1: General Guidelines**

We understand there are a variety of factors and levels of risk at play for each individual or family; therefore, we want to offer a few guidelines and allow each family to decide what



makes most sense for them. Above all, if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe hosting or being hosted, we encourage you to stay home.

In compliance with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Indiana State and local guidelines, we strongly encourage that congregants in these gatherings 1) maintain a safe social distance, 2) wear protective masks, and 3) support healthy hygiene behaviors in their homes such as regular hand washing, providing hand sanitizer, and proper home sanitation measures.

If you do not have access to a mask or hand sanitizer, the church has a limited supply available for host homes to provide. Please email Eric Swanson at [eswanson@yourchurch.com](mailto:eswanson@yourchurch.com) to coordinate a pickup time for any needs.

In order to further mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we ask that once you gather with a family(s) for worship, that you continue with that same family(s) each Sunday during Phase 1. While we understand the desire to see more of our church family, keeping the same groups together will help isolate cases if there is ever an infection.

Before committing to gather with a specific family(s), make sure that all parties are comfortable with the arrangement and ensure that social distancing can be maintained in the home. We understand that staying socially distant in homes will limit the amount of people any one family can reasonably host, and that is our reasoning for limiting the in-home gatherings for Phase 1. If anyone in these groups tests positive for COVID-19 or exhibits significant symptoms, we ask that all members of the group wait at least fourteen (14) days before gathering again.

To be clear, these gatherings are not exclusively being hosted within Castleton Small Groups. If you choose to serve as a host, you can let the church staff or an elder know so we can support you and communicate any changes during Phase 1.

**Striving for Unity:** We unfortunately anticipate that the Deceiver is ready to sow division among our body as we form these gatherings. Therefore, let us strive to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”(Eph. 4:2-3). Let’s not give the devil a foothold; rather, let’s be gracious toward those who come to differing convictions on participation in such gatherings.

### **At-Risk Population**

If you are included in the vulnerable population ([see CDC At-Risk populations](#)), we urge you to continue to follow CDC guidelines and worship at home during this time. If you need assistance of any kind to stay home and safe, please let us know [here](#).



## **Our Hope**

Our hope and expectation for these small gatherings is that each one be filled with the Spirit of Christ (Matt. 18:20), and that each individual would take advantage of this opportunity to intentionally invest in one another's spiritual well-being through prayer, fellowship, and discipleship of one another and their children. Each week, we hope you'll take advantage of the discipleship resources provided on our website and maximize these gatherings for God's glory and your good. We also pray God would use these home gatherings for evangelistic opportunities as friends and neighbors witness the fellowship and hope we have in Christ.

## **Request to Host or Guest**

If you are not in the vulnerable population and would like to host a family from our church or you need help connecting with a host family, you can let us know by filling out a [Phase 1: Gather Again Request Form](#), and we'll do our best to connect you with a family to worship alongside. We regretfully expect that some families may not be able to find a family to gather with for a variety of reasons; nevertheless, we ask that you remain patient and trust the Lord that He will continue to provide all your needs in Christ.

Like in all seasons, we plan with open hands and recognize our best efforts will most likely fall short and change over time, yet we will continue to hold fast to the One who is our sure and steady anchor and is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

## **Phase 1: "Gather Again" in Homes Summary**

**Summary:** Lord willing, beginning Sunday, May 17, 2020, we are encouraging College Park Castleton families to host 1-2 additional family units (limit 10 individuals) from among our church community and neighborhoods to worship together each Sunday morning in their homes.

### **Phase 1 Guideline Summary:**

- Limit home Sunday worship gatherings to 10 (ten) individuals or less
- Maintain social distancing (6ft.)
- Wear protective masks (available upon request)
- Support healthy hygiene behaviors in host homes (hand washing, hand sanitizer, tissues, thorough sanitation efforts on commonly used areas)
- Gather with same individuals each week to mitigate possibility of spread
- [Vulnerable populations](#) encouraged to continue to worship at home
- If you need help find a family to worship alongside, let us know by filling out a [Phase 1: Gather Again Request Form](#)
- All other ministries will continue virtually



## Phase 2: "Gather Again" Outdoors

**Summary:** Lord willing, beginning Sunday, June 14, 2020, we plan to periodically offer special outdoor services on the church property, in addition to the regular Sunday morning livestream.

### Phase 2: Further Details

- Livestream services will continue each Sunday morning at 10 a.m. and we encourage phase one in-home worship gatherings to continue meeting
- Weather permitting, we'll periodically gather outdoors for special evening services
  - Social distancing (6ft.) maintained throughout outdoor services
  - Protective masks will be available upon request
  - Hand sanitizer stations available
  - [Vulnerable populations](#) encouraged to continue to take strong precautions and remain in their vehicles during the special outdoor services
  - Communion is observed with pre-packaged elements and safe distribution

## Phase 3: "Gather Again" Indoors

**Summary:** Presently, the elders are unsure when indoor services will commence. The elders and staff long for the day when we can worship together in our building, but there are a variety of factors that cause us to delay gathering indoors. Those factors include:

- Our church sanctuary capacity is extremely limited with the social distancing limitations
- Many of our church members are in the vulnerable population
- Pastor Tommy is among the most vulnerable population and is unable to preach in-person without a mask
- The entrances, exits, Atrium, and Commons are all narrow which make it difficult to social distance
- Limited bathrooms increase risk of the virus spreading
- Our sanctuary has limited ventilation and would stretch services across the day
- We have many young families with young children and providing childcare is discouraged at this time

## Zoom Q&A Meetings

If you have any questions regarding our "Gather Again" plan, we will be holding all congregation Zoom Q&A meeting next Friday evening, May 8, at 8 p.m. You can find details about this Congregation Zoom Q&A at [castleton.yourchurch.com/zoom](https://castleton.yourchurch.com/zoom)

