

Good evening North Roanoke,

Greetings and blessings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! A year ago this past weekend, we gathered for small groups and worship. On the following weekend, we had 10 people in the sanctuary for a livestreamed service. As “two weeks to flatten the curve” gave way to ever-changing advice and regulations, it became clear we would be relying solely on a livestream for longer than we had hoped. I am grateful to God for the volunteers who adapted and continued to serve, and I am grateful for you, the North Roanoke family of faith, who continued to worship in your homes, to pray, and to serve one another where and when you could. This past year, while challenging, has been filled with evidence of God’s grace and hand upon our lives.

Of the many things that we did not do last year, I especially missed gathering on Easter. Being at the church building on Easter with almost no one there was among the strangest moments and feelings of my adult life. So, I want to begin by saying we will worship together and in-person in the gymnasium on Easter Sunday, April 4. By worshiping in the gym, we can practice social distancing and still accommodate a sizable congregation. If you can do so safely, I want to encourage you to join us this Easter. For some, it may be your first Sunday back. I cannot wait to see you in person!

While we have missed out on some things over the past year, God has also given us an unusual opportunity to better understand that He is an all-wise God and that the things He has given us in His Word to be and to do as a local church are a vital part of being fully-devoted followers of Jesus. As we see a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, God is calling us to return stronger than ever for the glory of King Jesus. With the remainder of this letter, I want to outline some things we can do to be available for God to work mightily in and through us in the days and years to come.

### **Confession | Prayer | Resolve**

This year has been a difficult one – isolation, school years interrupted, graduations missed, parenting and work routines dramatically changed, jobs lost, and sicknesses endured. Some in our church family have passed away due to COVID-19 and other illnesses, and we have not always been able to grieve together and with their family as we normally would. Yes, it has certainly been a hard year.

But some important things have not changed: God is good, and lasting pleasure comes not from the fleeting treasures and pleasures of this world but in His presence (Psalm 16:11). Even in a pandemic, we can know and enjoy Him because of what Jesus accomplished for us in His death and resurrection. Perhaps you look back on the last year with some embarrassment, frustration, shame, guilt, or apathy. Perhaps you have not been delighting in God’s presence. Perhaps there is a lot of complaining. Perhaps you could have been a better husband or wife. Perhaps you could have been more Christ-like during the most bizarre presidential election season I have ever seen. Perhaps you squandered the time God gave you on social media. I could go on and on, but I trust the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind whatever He desires. When He does, do not be paralyzed by guilt and shame and stay stuck on the sidelines. That is what Satan wants, but it is not what Jesus wants. Christ’s outstretched arms and nail-pierced hands still declare that “it is finished.” Remember the promise of 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Whatever thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, or actions are hindering you from enjoying God’s presence, turn from them; tell Jesus about them, and ask for forgiveness and for the Spirit to fill you and give you fresh power for living for the glory of Jesus. He will!

After evaluating your own heart, I want to ask you to join me in a season of focused prayer for our church family. If you have not been able to join us for a while, I want you to know God has been doing some wonderful things. He has sent new families to join our fellowship – in the middle of a pandemic! When we are all able to be back together, we need a season to be *together* – more on that later in this letter. I have asked our staff and Sunday School teachers to devote some time, every day, between now and Sunday, April 11 to pray specifically for our church family. Let’s pray for one another – that we would be resolved not to let the pandemic defeat us and that we would return and be regular in our participation in small groups and worship as soon as we can safely do so; that God would raise up the remaining volunteers needed to serve the many babies and preschoolers that God has sent, and that we would be laser-focused on the glory of Jesus and the mission of making disciples who make disciples.

### **Sunday, April 11 | 3D Groups at 9:15 and Worship at 10:30AM**

The reason I have asked for a season of focused prayer through Sunday, April 11 is that this is the Sunday that small groups before worship will officially resume. We have several groups already meeting on Sunday morning, and we hope most will resume on April 11. We may have to consolidate some classes into a larger class in the gym for social distancing, but there will be a place for you beginning April 11.

### **Sunday School | Now 3D Groups**

This is a simple but strategic change. For years, we have referred to the small groups that meet on Sunday mornings as “Sunday School.” Over the past 15–20 years or so, many churches have maintained the Sunday School model but opted for a different name. There are a couple of key reasons for this.

First, the name “Sunday School” includes the word “school” which places the emphasis on teaching. Teaching is very important, but it only captures one of the three core purposes for which Sunday School was created. The goal of small groups meeting on Sunday prior to worship is to reach others, teach the Word, and minister to the body. Smaller groups are the right size to pray together for lost friends, co-workers, and relatives. They are the right size to be able to support one another during the tough seasons of life and to encourage one another to remain faithful to Christ in every season. Finally, small groups provide an opportunity to study, pray through, and apply ourselves to the Word together.

Second, small groups are part of our strategy to help make well-rounded disciples – people who love, study, witness, serve, and pray. All these things can happen in a well-functioning small group. Small groups, done well, should help us live the Christian life faithfully in every dimension of life. They should lead us to be 3-dimensional, or well-rounded, believers. Of course, and this is very important, small groups are a supplement to, not a substitute for, corporate worship. Indeed, a healthy small group is a place where we encourage one another to be regular and consistent in gathering for worship as we are commanded to do (Hebrews 10:25). So, my prayer is that our 3D groups will help us be *driven* to reach others, *dedicated* to God's Word, and *devoted* to Jesus and to one another. I want to encourage every 3D group to review these three purposes and consider how the Lord will lead you to pursue each of them.

### **One church | Worshiping Together**

For as long as social distancing is needed for our worship gatherings, we will offer a service on Saturday. Many have expressed how much they have enjoyed the outdoor services. We hope to offer an outdoor service during warmer-weather months from time-to-time even when things return to “normal.”

As we look to a future when households are no longer required to sit six-feet apart, my hope is that we will maintain one, Sunday-morning service for people of all ages and backgrounds. By starting at 10:30, I hope this will allow us to have services that do not feel too “rushed,” that we can pause to pray for one another, perhaps even sing an extra song if the Spirit so leads. According to the New Testament, one of the primary ways the power of the gospel is displayed to the watching world is when it brings people together – not just into the same building but into the same mission and the same worship of the same God Who alone can conquer our sin and make us one in Jesus. The gospel brings together young and old (Titus 2). It brings together red, yellow, black, and white (Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 1:8). It brings together hymns and spiritual songs – indeed, we are commanded to sing a variety of songs (Col 3:16). This past year of being unified in our worship has not only been pleasing to God but also a time of spiritual growth and maturation. I have heard from younger people how they have been blessed and edified by singing some hymns. I have heard from seniors about the joy of seeing younger families and being able to worship together and learn new songs. What we have seen and experienced is a beautiful picture of the gospel on display. I pray we continue in this fashion for the glory of our King until He comes.

As we consider an eventual return to normal, one of the challenges we will eventually face will be the issue of a space to worship. Before the pandemic, the sanctuary began to “feel full” with 270 people in attendance. Now, it feels full with just 115 worshipers. Even if that number eventually grows to 225, it will fall well short of the space that, I pray, we will need to accommodate the worshipers who call North Roanoke home. Now that people are more aware of infectious diseases and the transmission of germs through airborne droplets, architects who work with churches are increasing their space guidance for worship venues. While we do not have the resources to build a new sanctuary (perhaps one day!), we do have a large space available to us where we can worship. If you have been at North Roanoke for a while, you know we have held worship services in the gym. The size and shape of the gym is much more conducive to spreading out and being together. The primary challenges are aesthetics, acoustics, and the lack of a permanent A/V booth all of which can be addressed without compromising the recreational use of the gym during the week.

While the gym seems like an ideal place to worship on Sunday mornings (once improved), the sanctuary needs some cosmetic updates as well. For the foreseeable future, the sanctuary could function as a great space for prayer meetings, business meetings, special services (e.g. Good Friday, Christmas Eve), weddings, funerals, and special discipleship/teaching opportunities. Since the sanctuary is already outfitted with improved technology, we could have, with an up-fitted gym and a refreshed sanctuary, two great spaces to gather.

We are also working on updated pricing related to the proposed relocation and renovation of the preschool. We had planned to bring a proposal to the church one year ago, and then the pandemic struck. Because you have remained faithful and generous in your giving, I believe it is time to revisit this opportunity.

I am excited for the opportunities before us, and I am hopeful that we will embrace them as good gifts from our Heavenly Father to be united in declaring that Jesus Christ is our King.

### **Community Center | Outstanding Debt**

I am often asked about where we stand on the debt for the community center (gymnasium). This is an important question as we consider opportunities to make other improvements to our facilities. By

God's grace, we are making steady progress. Just a little more than five years ago, we owed \$1,070,000. Today, the debt on the community center stands at \$486,838! We are on pace to eliminate the debt by 2026 or perhaps even sooner. If we continue to respond to the amazing gift of Jesus as generous givers, I believe we can continue to make solid progress on our loan and make some needed and strategic improvements to our facility. Toward this end, the property committee will bring two motions at our next business meeting (Sunday, March 28 at 5PM):

- The property committee moves that we use funds, up to \$15,000, from our general checking account to fix the roof and awning that covers the double doors that are used to enter the building from the far east end (the doors used to access the church office).
- The property committee moves that we use funds from our general checking account in the amount of \$5,528 to have Whitescarver Engineering replace all existing thermostats with WiFi-enabled thermostats that can be adjusted remotely using a smart phone or tablet.

The first motion relates to a roof in desperate need of repair. The second motion involves the thermostats in our building. During the pandemic, we have seen how easily a thermostat can be overlooked (we have 18!). By standardizing the thermostats and giving remote access, we will be able to have much better programming for each zone and anticipate saving on utility costs over time.

### **Legal changes | Administrative Adjustments**

If you have kept up with the news in Virginia and in our country over the last couple of years, you probably know the legal environment has become increasingly challenging for local churches that follow the Scriptures in their employment practices (and some other areas as well). To provide better legal protections for our employees and other church leaders, the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia strongly recommends that we pursue incorporation as a church. After consulting with a representative with the SBCV and then contacting an attorney who specializes in church incorporation, the deacons have determined they will bring a motion at our next business meeting (Sunday, March 28). Below is the text of their motion:

- The deacons move that we use funds, up to \$7,500, from our general checking account to contract with the Reynolds Law Group, PLLC to pursue incorporation of the church.

Because this letter is already long, please see the [Q&A to Church Incorporation](#) if you have any questions about this process and its implications for our church family. In addition to providing a better legal shield for our church, the process will also provide an opportunity to review our Constitution and Bylaws and the meaning and significance of church membership and adopt documents that help us be faithful to God's design for the local church — churches led by a team of pastors and ultimately governed by its members. If you made it this far, I want to thank you for your patience and endurance. I love you and am so excited for what God has in store!

In Christ's love,

Pastor Daniel

P.S. Thank you for your prayers and concern for my health! I believe I was just dehydrated and perhaps a bit exhausted this past Sunday, but I plan to see a doctor as soon as possible just to be sure.