



20th June 2020, Saturday

To: Pastors, EDC and worshippers of Bethel Presbyterian Church,

Dear brothers and sisters,

On the 18th of June, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) released Phase 2 Advisory with some eager anticipation.¹ We are glad that solemnization is allowed and a doubling from the previous maximum limit of 10 guests. At a wake and funeral service, not more than 20 persons may pay their last respect at any one time. Pastoral and staff will continue to work from home as default. Worship service may resume from 26th of June onwards. What does it mean to Bethel? Shall we resume worship service? It seems more than meets the eye.

The Sum of Age and Chronic Diseases: Local Covid-19 related death cases are predominantly above the age of 60. Coincidentally, Bethel has a fairly large proportion of members born before 1960. Even up to Phase 2, our government has persistently encouraged our elderly citizens to stay home. We should be mindful of this stance, whether we are going to church or to any other places outside of our home. Although the fact that age is an important criterion, there is also the serious consideration for pre-existing concomitant chronic diseases some of us are diagnosed with.

So now the question is: A) What is the price we are willing to pay so that we could reduce the probability of death? To stay home for another month, or frequent less in crowded spaces? B) Reversely, what is the compensation we are willing to receive so that we can risk the increased probability of death? More freedom of movements, or exchange for some instant gratification, even if it meant increased mortality risks. Economists, epidemiologists and public health experts call this VOSL – Value of Statistical Life.² Our pastors and I do not claim to be experts but we care for the flock God has entrusted to us. Instant resumption of worship service will likely be delayed.

¹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-religious-activities-allowed-to-resume-in-phase-two-of-reopening>, taken on 20th Jun 2020, 3:45pm.

² <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/lives-v-livelihoods-debate-the-economists-take>, taken on 20th Jun 2020, 4:04pm.



Avoid complexity of information overload: Another vital concern for Bethel is that we are committed to conduct well our first electronic Annual Congregational Meeting (eACM) on 25th Jul, Saturday. Holding our eACM right is key, as it is a means of being accountable to God, to His Church and our government. Very soon, at the end of our worship services, from the WhatsApp Group you are in, Bethel's website and your personal email, you will hear from our detailed announcement about eACM. Your voting on resolutions and elections can only be accomplished by proxy. Follow the instructions carefully and respectfully.

Our administrators, individually and collectively, are supporting key appointment holders and doing a brilliant job. But they are feeling the heavy load of materials and intricate coordination of several involved parties. The last thing we want is you, members of Bethel, having to suffer information overload which may result in unwanted confusion and fatigue. So, to prepare for resumption of worship service, and meshed with the need to conduct eACM, this would be a communication nightmare in the making. Sensibly, worship service will resume only after eACM.

Realistic Existing Constraints to Resolve: MCCY advisory states the constraints of not exceeding 50 worshippers in one location. Singing and "live performance" are considered high risks to transmission and therefore, are prohibited. A wise pastor of ours advised we should consider the current situation in the 3 facets of economy, health and human rights. As long as we are not allowed the way of life we are used to, these constraints will be nudging closely to the realm of infringement to human rights. Constraints laid by the authorities will always be challenged, even if it may be with the best interest at heart. But the communitarian culture in Singapore has balanced the issue of human rights gingerly in our society. Like many Asian countries, we value social solidarity.³ Thus, we ask for your rational patience in resuming worship service.

Technological Connectivity is Functioning Effectively: Current manner of online worship is made possible by a dedicated team of New Media Taskforce. Due in part to the dedication of church-wide and congregational teams, this is working well for

³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/putting-common-good-ahead-of-individual-freedoms-have-helped-in-asian-countries-fight>, taken on 20th June 2020, 4:09pm.



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most of us. Although comments and questions are bound to be raised, we saw creativity tried and originality approved. We recognised improvements as the weeks go by, breakthroughs in various worship services. Who would have believed us if we predicted in 2020, we, along with our elderly members, will worship God through live streaming? Could you have believed whole-heartedly that our members will pray and study God's Word online together?! You know what? Bethel has demonstrated agility in the face of insurmountable challenges.

Preparing Bethel for Resumption of Onsite Worship Service: Anti Covid-19

Taskforce has always been keeping an eye on the ball. The team has embarked on evaluating and will soon propose a thermal-scanner that can screen a handful of persons at a time. Crowd control will abide by the principle of avoiding contact, which we will see entry in one point and exit from another. Habits will have to change. And since 7th April, I think we are getting used to changing habit that is civically acceptable. Your health and life are paramount; you are too precious to risk losing them.

When the community transmission remains low single digits over 2 infectious cycles, we are confidently set up for resumption. Thus, step by step, we will prepare to resume worship service in August. So, I invite you to pray alongside and journey with us. The Lord bless you and keep you.

Humbly yours,

Rev Lim Tau Wei.