

STEPPING OUT OF LOCKDOWN

A Pathway for our Church

At the start of the Coronavirus lockdown our church services quickly transferred online and onto the phone, with an increasing number tuning in each Sunday to worship Jesus together...simply at a distance. Many of our regular mid-week activities, our Life Groups, Seniors Ministry, Youth and Children's groups have also creatively adapted in order to keep connection, relationship, care and discipleship going. Our church family and various leaders have shown themselves to be adaptable and incredibly open to encountering and sharing Jesus in new and fresh ways; often over-coming barriers to do so. We thank God for inspiring and gifting the church during this season.

As social distancing restrictions are increasingly being eased and government and denominational guidance being issued, it is important that we share with you our pathway for stepping out of lockdown as a church. Understandably, some of the detail and timing may change. The direction, however, is set. This pathway and timescale is shared to clarify the careful and strategic transition towards a fuller expression of our Church family moving forwards and growing together again.

We have developed a four-step process that will be introduced across the summer months, subject to continued improvements and easing of restrictions. Each step builds on the preceding one.

STEP 1: Jun 28 – Jul 25

Key Focus: PRAY

We are praying people. God has called us to be a House of Prayer. Our church building has already reopened for Private Prayer on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. This week we start fortnightly prayer meetings where there will be chance to gather together and pray. There will be a led devotion at these prayer meetings as well. Please note there are two gatherings one specifically for individuals in deemed to be at increased risk to coronavirus. Sign up at goldhill.org/prayermeeting. Places limited and precautions in place.

During this phase our Sunday gatherings will continue online (9am (Kids) and 10am) and on the phone. These will continue in different forms well into the Autumn.

STEP 2: Jul 26 – Aug 16

COMMUNION & TEACHING

As a church community we gather together around the Bible and around the meal of Communion. Building on the prayer gatherings we will be increasing the number of meetings in the building and introducing communion gatherings as well as some teaching seminars. We will only do this when we are confident that we can adhere to the very best safety practices, having learnt from, and tested our systems and approaches in STEP ONE.

Online and phone services will continue. There may however be some changes to content or frequency of children or youth ministry due to it being the Summer Holidays.

OUT OF THE BOX IDEA:

Could you start to physically gather with one other household to either watch the service on Sundays or run your own gathering?

If it is **safe** for you to do so, you are **comfortable** to and you have enough **space** to safely do it, why not join up with another household and be church physically together. Social distancing and appropriate hygiene measures need to be kept, but you could encourage one another by being physically together. Whilst sung worship cannot take place in our building, you could do this together in your home. You could also safely celebrate communion together.

If there are friends or neighbours who are far from God, but are interested in joining you, what a wonderful way to connect with them!

Please do not feel pressure to engage beyond what you are comfortable with. We would also encourage you to be aware of those shielding and not able to meet physically. Please continue to reach out to help keep them connected.

STEP 3: Aug 17-30

Key Focus: FELLOWSHIP

If infection rates continue to fall, we anticipate that regulations will be further relaxed to enable several households to start to gather safely. We hope that this could be the time when Life Groups could meet physically together, if they are safe to do so, comfortable to do so and there is sufficient space to do so. The church building could be used for some of these gatherings.

It might be that some of the larger Life Groups choose to meet in two groups as numbers allow. This may make space for others to join longer term as well. Online and phone services will continue and we will be inviting certain groups to gather on a Sunday in the Main Church to explore arrangements and practicalities.

STEP 4: Sep 6 onwards

Key Focus: GATHER, GROW & MULTIPLY

We aim to launch multiple gatherings across the week during this step. We will continue to be one church, but made up of multiple gatherings. This is no new thing. Before Lockdown we were already a multi-congregational church with 6 different congregations (Hope, Seniors, Breathe, 8:15, 10am, 7pm at Gold Hill). These multiple-gatherings were in addition to the variety of Life Groups and smaller gatherings. However, we feel led by God to increase the number of gatherings with the aim of growing and reaching more people. The restrictions in place coming out of Lockdown also provide for us an opportunity to do this.

This increase in the number of gatherings will take place across the Autumn Term and into 2021 with more details coming across the Summer about these new gatherings. Some will look similar to pre-lockdown gatherings; others will look rather different. We all recognise though that there is a strong probability that precautions will remain in place during the Autumn and therefore Church gatherings may look different with folk in face-masks, no congregational singing, communion served by gloved hands and outdoor baptisms only. Online and phone services will continue in some form during this step whilst people remain isolated.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRY

I am working with Natalie and Shona on how best to continue ministry with Children and Young People as restrictions are eased. The guidance from Government and from the Baptist Union would make certain aspects of ministry with these age groups in person rather challenging and less effective than what is currently being provided online. Shona, Natalie and their leadership teams will communicate their plans over the coming weeks.

OFFICE HOURS AND STAFF TEAM

Over the summer months Staff will be using the building more frequently and we will be sharing the Church Office opening times with you shortly.

I hope that informing you of the planned pathway is helpful. Obviously, the current situation is still changing and so we cannot be certain of the timings on any of the above phases, but we will seek to communicate plans and any changes clearly and ahead of time. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to get in touch.

Thank you so much for your continued encouragement, love and prayers for each person within the Gold Hill and Hope Church Family.

With much love,

Stephen (Interim Pastor - Team Leader)

14.7.20