

Suburban Regathering Roadmap

Statement to the Church on 31/10/21 -

(Presented at the end of the 10 AM Service)

This morning I would like to make a statement from the Elders about our church's roadmap out of lockdown.

As you all know Victoria has arrived at the State Government's roadmap target where 80% of our state is now fully vaccinated, and the State is beginning to open up in a limited way.

All public gatherings of any kind are subject to certain restrictions, this includes hospitality venues, sporting events, entertainment and religious services or ceremonies, or places of worship. Basically, anywhere that a crowd might gather. Churches have the opportunity to open up from this past Friday the 29th.

The problem that we have as a church, is how do we do that and serve and love all of our church family and the wider community? That is the question for Suburban that our Elders and Senior Staff have prayed and wrestled with over the last few weeks as we have tried to discern what to do.

As I shared with you all a few weeks ago, there are some important things which we have had to consider, in order to make our decision. Let me briefly remind you about what those things were. The leadership has determined that:

1. We believe that it is everyone's individual right to make their own decisions on the matter of vaccinations. As you make your decision -
 - a. Seek good medical advice,
 - b. Use your conscience, but remember it is useful but not infallible,
 - c. Consider how you can best love your neighbour through your decision.
2. We do not believe that this is a Gospel or Salvation issue, or that there is any direct scriptural basis to forbid or encourage vaccinations. There are certainly some scriptures to consider when thinking it through, but no direct commands.
3. We believe that as a church, Suburban should promote unity in our congregation and avoid disunity over this issue. This is critical to our mission and outreach! Christ said that the world will know we are His disciples by the love and unity we show with one another.

4. We believe that it is important for Suburban to gather regularly. However there are occasions and circumstances which can legitimately cause us to suspend meeting all together in person and instead meet in limited or smaller groups or on-line for the common good of our congregation and the wider community.
5. We believe that the scripture instructs us to obey the government as the God's ordained authority for the good of society and the community. This is as long as we are not asked to disobey direct scriptural commands.
6. We believe that Suburban needs to love and consider everyone in our congregation and in the wider community and do that in a balanced and God honouring way. Again, this is critical to our mission and vision - to Love Jesus, Love One Another & Love our City!
7. We believe that Suburban must keep an eternal perspective in view. The Gospel is far more important than this issue! Our city of Wyndham needs the gospel of Christ more than they need a vaccine or an anti-vaccine message, so what is the message we are sending?

The Plan for Suburban -

After much prayer and deliberation, the elders came to a unanimous decision this week to open up as soon as we can, after the 80% target was reached. The Staff have set the opening date as the 14th of November to give us time to prepare.

In line with the Government limitations, we will open by offering people the temporary opportunity to attend one of 3 scheduled live services on Sunday, as space, resources, and COVID limits allow.

- The first service will include those as per the Government limits for a larger group (175 fully vaccinated people within the 4sqm density quotient),
- The second service will include those as per the Government limits for an unknown vaccination status group which allows for 30 people to gather.
- The 3rd opportunity for people will be to continue to watch the live stream of the first service from their homes which we will still provide.

As you consider these options you may decide that subject to the limits in place, you would like to meet together in homes and watch the live stream in a group, but we'll leave that to you to decide and organise on your own.

Please notice my intentional language... 'include', not 'exclude', and 'opportunity' not 'restriction'. Remember that it is an amazing privilege to worship God together whether in a small group or a large group. In many places in the world believers can't meet together at all because preaching the gospel is forbidden and reading the Bible and praying are against the law. This is not the case here in Victoria and Australia. Let's rejoice that we can get started meeting together in some way, with an opportunity for everyone.

In order for us to be able to facilitate two live services and the live stream, we need a lot of volunteers. As a workplace we are required to ensure that all staff and volunteers who work onsite are double vaccinated, so if that's you, we need you! We will have a special volunteer's service on Sunday morning the 7th, to have a practice run and get organised for opening up on the 14th, (rumour has it that you may get breakfast on that day). If you are a regular volunteer in any ministry on a Sunday, then you need to be here on the 7th. If you haven't volunteered at Suburban yet, then now is the time to jump in. We welcome you to come and serve with us. There will be ticketing for the service for the 7th, so make sure you get in and sign up. Also rest assured that your private information will be stored in a password protected files in the office, in line with our privacy policy.

On the matter of unity and division, let me say that I know that there are some strong feelings among most people in our congregation about this issue, and that is true on both sides. I'd like to refer you to a passage of scripture which I believe is helpful here. I've just spent 8 months immersed in the book of Romans, so it won't surprise you that I am going there. Romans 15:1-7 - Nick is going to put the text up on the screen so that we can see it together.

Romans 15:1-7

1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.

3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,

6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

A few points from this passage.

1st, Rather than trying to figure out who is the strong and who is the weak in the passage, everyone just put yourself in the place of the strong, no matter what side you are on. Most of us have already put ourselves there anyway because we think we are right! So, as the strong we all have an obligation to 'bear with' the other side and not please ourselves. Each of us is to please our neighbour, as our Saviour did when He went to the cross!

2nd Because of our hope in Christ, Paul prays that God will help us to live in harmony and unity with one another, so that we can speak with "One Voice", to the community around us about our great God and His glorious gospel.

3rd We have been charged to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us, which means we all have to love each other sacrificially even in our differences.

As your Pastor, let me appeal to you all, do not let this divide us! We all have a decision to make, we will determine if division comes in to Suburban! It will not come from outside, it will come from our decisions as to whether we will love one another through this situation or whether we will allow the enemy to win and divide us over a non-gospel issue. I am confident that you will choose the path of love and unity!

If you have any thoughts you would like to share with us concerning these decisions we have made, please don't hesitate to chat with myself or one of the elders or senior staff. If you disagree with the decisions, I am asking you please don't take us to task on any form of social media, come and talk to me about it, I'll buy you a coffee or come to your home and speak with you about it. Remember, Suburban is a family, we can talk to one another!

We are also considering doing a Zoom webinar in a few days to clarify for anyone why we have come to these decisions, and to outline what it means for us. If you would be interested in that please let us know, maybe in the chat or send us an

email or text. You can send questions to this email address -
questions@suburbanchurch.org.

You also need to know that as a leadership we are praying and hopeful that things will change soon so that we can meet together as a whole church, and we are committed to getting to that as soon as we can. In fact, we are going to hold off having communion until we can all meet together in the same place and celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ together. We will be constantly monitoring the situation and the restrictions. We have appealed to the Government through the organisation we are a member of, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, a copy of that letter is attached.

One last thing I would like to say, our Elders are men of integrity and their commitment and work all through the pandemic and on this decision has demonstrated their love and care for you all! Our staff have worked tirelessly to continue the ministry to you over these past 18 months, and they too have shown their love, care, and commitment to you. This reopening decision and the journey to it has not been easy, but all of us have spent the time and the energy because we love Christ, and we love you as our church!

Blessings,

Pastor Tim