

21 Sept 2020

Pastoral Letter from Denesh about Sunday Church Restarting at Aperia

Dear Church Family,

I hope that this letter finds you in good spiritual health! Can you believe that it has been 26 weeks since we last saw each other in Aperia? We were studying the Sermon of the Mount back then and we are in the thick of Revelation now. How times flies!

Well, I am writing to update you of our plan, God willing, to return to Aperia starting 18 Oct 2020¹. I will not repeat the excellent talk Chris gave us on how to think about church recently². Let me outline some key details of our plan here and share with you why we choose this plan.

The plan:

- Starting 18 Oct 2020, God-willing, we plan to have 5 Sunday English Congregations meeting in Aperia (9am, 10.30am, 12pm, 4pm & 5.30pm). Mandarin will meet at 2pm. Our hope is that the Government will allow meetings of 100 people by then.
- The current 9am Congregation will split to have some CGs remain at 9am Congregation while others move to the new 10.30am Congregation.
- The current 11.30am Congregation will split to have some move to the new 10.30am Congregation while others move to the new 12pm Congregation.
- The current 4pm Congregation will split to have some CGs go to the new 4pm Congregation while others move to the new 5.30pm Congregation.
- These 5 English Congregations and 1 Mandarin Congregation will be our new normal during Covid and even after Covid. This means that we just need to make one change now as a church which will hopefully see us through for a number of years.
- Families are very important to God and to us! As such, creche will be provided at all Congregations. But Planet Faith will only be available at 9am, 10.30am and 4pm so that we preserve the relationships kids and families have with one another and reduce the strain on our manpower. All kids will go to Planet Faith from the start to adhere to social distancing guidelines. It is likely that we will have Planet Faith at all Congregations in the next year or so.
- A roster will be sent out closer to the time letting you know which weeks we hope to see you at Aperia and which weeks you will watch the service via live streaming at home. You will have to book online to confirm your attendance at Aperia (using platforms like Breeze or Eventbrite). Any leftover spaces will then be given to the general church pool. Each week we will reserve a small number of seats for walk-ins and non-Christian guests. Roster and booking details will be shared in the coming weeks.
- No one will be judged or penalised for not feeling safe to return to Aperia. We love you and will miss you and understand if health or conscience issues prevent you from joining us at Aperia. As mentioned, all our services will be streamed live for you to access online at home.
- Live streaming means that the services will only be available online at the time of the actual services: 9am, 10.30am, 12pm, 4pm and 5.30pm.
- We will sit in groups of 5 people each with appropriate safe distancing between groups.
- You will have to adhere to all the usual guidelines during Covid: Safe Entry, temperature checks, wear a mask etc.
- While the 18 Oct is what we are aiming for, this is subject to Government approval.

¹ This is still pending Government approval.

² If you missed it please watch it here: <https://youtu.be/tifYOQIIOPc>

Why have we chosen this plan?

1. **It is more future-proof which means less changes for us in the next few years:** Despite Covid, we have grown as a church and right now, we already need 4 English Sunday Congregations. But we feel that moving to 5 Congregation will actually serve us better as a church for a few reasons. Firstly, having 5 Congregations means that we will not have to make another change for the next 2-3 years which will give us greater stability as a church and reduce change fatigue. Secondly, meeting as 5 Congregations with a 100 people restriction when we have over 1,000 members means that each person can return to Aperia physically every other week, which would yield a tremendous gain relationally and spiritually.
2. **It serves our aim of spiritual growth, not numerical growth:** We feel that having smaller congregations during Covid will allow relationships to deepen, it will facilitate more discipleship and training opportunities, and it will enable our staff to better serve you, equip you, and pastorally care for you. In addition to meeting together for services at Aperia, there will also be lots of opportunity for speaking the truth in love to one another before and after service at the many eateries in Aperia as you meet in groups of 5. Our prayer is that all this will allow us to strengthen our core as a church as we grow spiritually together during this time.

What will the proposed plan involve and look like?

1. The Staff and your CGLs will contact you to work out which CGs will move to the different 5 Congregations. While this will involve some change and relational strain, we think that this will be minimal because we will keep CGs together.
2. This is a draft plan for staff manpower division under this 5 English Congregation Plan:

Congregation	Congregation Pastor	Male Staff	Female Staff	College Staff	Supervising Pastor	Admin
9:00 AM	Tim	Stuart	Zoe		Chris	Nicole (Admin) & Char Phua (Finance)
		Dan				
		Seb				
10:30 AM	Chris	Kenneth	(Elsie)	Wei Xiang	Chris	
		Gabe		Edric		
12:00 PM	Tom	Caleb	Elsie	(Edric)	Denesh	
2:00 PM (Mandarin)	JB	BS			Denesh	
		Marcus				
4:00 PM	Wally		Charmaine Ng		Denesh	
5.30 PM	Rob		Phoebe	Sam	Denesh	
			Eileen			

3. Denesh and Chris will still do the bulk of the preaching. But the post-college pastors can increasingly take on more preaching.
4. Staff will spend Sundays with their own Congregation to maximise relational and discipleship opportunities. This will also result in better pastoral care.
5. Our aim both during and post Covid will be for services to last a maximum of 70 mins. It is likely that they will be much shorter during Covid because of Government restrictions.

How can I contribute positively to this restart at Aperia?

I am sure you appreciate that there is no perfect plan. Every plan will have pros and cons. And I am sure you are aware that some change is inevitable. Speaking personally, the last thing I wanted for our church this year, having sent off Gateway Church last year, was to make a change. However in light of the long-term nature of Covid, we have to make the best of the current situation. The elders, deacons, staff and CGLs have been deliberating these issues for the last two months and it is our collective opinion that the above plan gives us the best chance to mature and grow as a church during Covid and beyond.

I think it is natural to feel lethargic about returning to Aperia for church because it is now so convenient to have church online at home and we have been doing this for 26 weeks!

It is also natural to complain about the plan, to be self-centered about it, to think only about what works for us and what serves our own preferences, especially if our CG has to move to a new service timing that is not our preferred option.

But as people who follow the Lord Jesus, we need to fight against all these sinful urges. After all, Jesus was sacrificial even at great cost to himself so that he could serve the good of others. So as people who follow Christ, it is crucial that we take our cue from him. So we must consider others before ourselves, we should be sacrificial so that others can be served, we need to think of the greater good of the church over and above our own personal preference. Indeed, as we reorganize ourselves into 5 congregations, there will be more needs at church. As such, if you are able to serve in various ministries such as administration, music, multimedia, Planet Faith etc., please speak to your CGLs and congregational staff teams about it!

I have every confidence that with the help of God's Spirit, we can all make this restart incredibly positive and encouraging for our whole church.

Will you pray for the Lord to guide us and bless these plans? Pray that He will grant us the approvals we need. Pray that He will keep us united in the gospel. Pray that these changes will really strengthen us spiritually and relationally as a church family.

If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to contact your CGL, our staff, or me.

In Christ,

Denesh

On behalf of the Elders (Chris and Stuart), Staff, Deacons & CGLs