Waiting is hard! Children are impatient for Christmas—students for the results of entrance exams—and all of us for the results of biopsies. Eight hours of work can seem unending and 70 seconds of interval training at the gym can stretch forever—if only we could go to the gym! Our whole world has been disrupted and we grow weary waiting to get back to “normal” or even “new normal." Redemption Hill Church has not gathered in person for more than ten weeks, and counting! Some churches are setting aside Safer at Home and calendaring “re-open” dates—May 31 is especially popular.

**So how about us? When will we resume in-person ministry? The short answer is, “we don’t know yet,** but it won’t be May 31.”

Personally, I groan at this answer—I do not want to be apart anymore. I want to see you, to give a hug, to eat a donut, to pray on the patio, to worship in the same room, to get back to how things were and then move forward from there. But I want to follow Jesus most of all. And because of that, I am prepared to continue waiting.

Redemption Hill has its feet planted in God’s word—knowing and obeying it—however hard that may be. Our overseer team has spent a great deal of time in prayer and in God’s word, seeking to follow his guidance. We have adjusted ministry during this season because we want to love the vulnerable and we want to be in subjection to our government—something we are always to do, as long as we can still obey Jesus (Romans 13; 1 Peter 2; Titus 3). We believe we can still do that.

Our conviction that we are following God does not mean those who differ with us are not. We are in ongoing conversation with churches around us and we notice everyone seems to be *interpreting* the scriptures in very similar ways. The differing responses arise out of how they *apply* in differing contexts. (**Please read the attached FAQ document to understand how the scriptures are guiding us**).

Los Angeles County has some of the most restrictive measures in place. Churches in neighboring counties may be able to offer drive up services and other modified in-person ministry, but these are not presently open to us. We continue to seek creative ways to minister within our restrictions and a lot of good has already been done. ABC’s, Life Groups, Men’s and Women’s groups and ministry for all life stages is happening on line—and even growing! From the beginning of Safer at Home we have had a strong pastoral care telephone ministry as well. **This Sunday we are adding a pre-service “virtual foyer” where we can see each other. This week we are also adding a “drop in and connect with staff” time at 10:00 a.m. each Tuesday and Thursday. We are also adding telephone dial-up access to services and group conference calls that don’t require a computer or technical ability.**

We have reached out to our local mayor to see how we can move forward more effectively and he is very sympathetic to the plight of churches relative to the state and county restrictions we are living under. **We have established a task force for returning to in-person ministry through a phased plan—tied not to dates, but to levels of freedom.** They will help lead us forward in a measured, safe, return to in-person ministry. We are working on creative ways to have “socials,” to provide modified worship settings (perhaps drive-up?), to provide places for smaller groups to meet face to face, etc. Nothing is certain, but returning to in-person ministry will likely start with smaller groups, and possibly significantly modified worship settings. This will probably involve social distancing and may mean our most vulnerable will be the slowest to return to campus—however, we will continue to work hard at online and other creative alternative strategies so that everyone can participate.

The Psalmist often cries out, “How long, O Lord?” I read this with heightened sympathy these days. How long? If I answer from my emotions the answer is, “It’s already too long.” But if I believe God is good and he is sovereign, the answer has to be, “Just the right length of time.” My prayer is that we will all have grace and patience and that we will see God do deep and powerful things in our lives and in our church.

Prayerfully, on behalf of the overseers,

Pastor Robert