

Dear Parents,

We have been busy planning out the coming semester, and as you can imagine, this is not anything like our normal season of planning. We have worked hard to consider how we can meet the spiritual needs of our students in the midst of COVID. There is no easy answer, and no option that fits perfectly. Even while the world has changed and our plans continue to evolve and modify, our purpose to partner with you parents in the discipleship of your students remains the same. So that will look a little different this season, but we are committed to doing our best to still find ways to connect, encourage, disciple, and walk through these days with our junior high and high school students.

We are also aware that our students are struggling mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We want to find ways to cater our approach this semester to meet them where they are at, and encourage them in areas of weakness and hardship right now. This will mean new focuses, new efforts, and great reliance on teamwork within our leadership team to ensure that each student is being reached with intentional and thoughtful care. We are committed to meeting as a group to encourage each other through worship, small groups, and a message.

Please take a few minutes to read through our plan for the upcoming year. It has been approved by our task force team (they are in charge of guidelines and methods for opening any ministry at Bethel Community Church in the midst of COVID) and our Christian Education committee. There is no perfect plan. We are trying to find something that will give us the opportunity to gather as many of us together as possible for the sake of discipleship. All of this will be evaluated, and our approach could evolve as the year goes on.

**Wednesday Night Ministry:** *Starting September 16<sup>th</sup>, we plan to meet weekly for the purpose of encouragement, worship, and community life. We know that many of our students and families are feeling the effects of stress, isolation, and loss. We hope that our Wednesday night gatherings help feed our students spiritually in ways that will greatly help them navigate these days.*

COVID Considerations for Wednesdays:

1. Masks will be required upon entry of the building. We know that some welcome the requirement of the mask, and for others this is a disappointment. Here are a few reasons why we have come to this conclusion:
  - We believe that by wearing masks, we will be able to gather more of our student body together, which ultimately allows us to accomplish our goal of encouraging and discipling students through these days. If masks were not required, there is a portion of our student body and leadership team that would not attend for a variety of reasons. We see their needs, are mindful of them, and want to put their needs before our own for the sake of our whole body. We see this as an opportunity to practice Philippians 2 and serving others by putting their interests before our own. We see this as a way to promote unity as we are so often encouraged to do in scripture. We believe

- the whole body has something to benefit as more of us will be there to partake in our gatherings.
- Band members and the speaker will not wear masks while on stage, but will be properly distanced from any of the students and from each other
2. We will meet in our sanctuary, which is a much larger space than our youth room. This will allow for more spacing to occur during the worship and message portion of the night.
  3. Small groups will meet in larger rooms, allowing for greater opportunity for social distancing. AWANA is not meeting for the time, which gives us access to more of the building with bigger rooms and empty hallways. JAM will be going through our "Bible Instruction Course". They will have a large room where they are able to spread out at tables. *Masks will be worn during small groups and during BIC.*
  4. We will be putting students in position to practice social distancing during the night. Leaders will be reminding students from the stage to give space and be respectful of others space. We ask that you have the conversation with your student about your guidelines regarding handshakes, fist pounds, and hugs.
  5. Please do not send your student to youth group if they are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19. If a student arrives and is not feeling well, they will be sent home.

## Outreach

At this time, we plan to pivot our approach to outreach. We are as passionate as ever about reaching out to those who do not know Christ. As we looked at what we have done in previous years, we saw a lot of ways that this approach would be hindered with our current situation. We knew it would change our planning and what sorts of games and activities we could run responsibly. So, at this time, we will not be having our normal Sunday night outreach.

Our new approach is one that is looking at some of the practical needs around us. With most students doing e-learning, we want to provide a place where our students can invite their friends to do their e-learning together. We plan on opening the Connect Center every Monday for a limited size group of high school students. Masks will be required while inside the building. We hope to use these days as a way to serve and show love to our students and their friends by giving them a place to do their school work outside their home. **We plan on offering the space in the connect center starting September 21<sup>st</sup>.**

This is a very challenging time in so many areas of life. It is our prayer as leaders and as a church that JAM and Powerhouse would be such an encouragement to your family and especially your students these days. We know that there will be obstacles and plans will change over the course of these next months, but we believe all of it will be worth it.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email or call.

Sincerely,

Pastor Mark  
(847) 772-4730