

Save the Date: When, Why, and How We are Going Outside

May 2, 2021

by David Schrock

On Sunday May 16, OBC is going outside for service—or, at least, weather permitting, that's the plan. From May 16 until the Fall, we will gather outdoors for worship in our parking lot at 8:30am. Please bring lawn chairs, wear appropriate clothing, sunscreen, sunglasses, etc., and invite those who need to hear the message of God's grace and truth. To get ready for May 16, let me offer a few reflections on why and how we are going outside.

First, the primary reason we are going outside is not because of COVID or convenience. Rather, it is a matter of conviction. That conviction is the belief that a local church should gather together with one another. The Greek word for church (*ekklesiā*) means 'gathering' or 'assembly.' And the New Testament teaches that our gathering is a definitive marker for who we are as Christians. In other words, the members of the church are those who have covenanted together to gather every Lord's Day to worship the resurrected Christ. Without such gathering, the church is not the church and neither are its members. Gathering is what makes the church . . . a *church*.

Happily, we welcome others every Sunday. This includes our children (many of whom have yet to profess faith), unbelievers seeking Christ, those who have moved into the area, and in these days, people looking for a church that is gathering. But ultimately, the church is a people who have committed themselves to Christ *and* who gather with one another on a regular basis. Of course, being a member means more than gathering. But, as this last year has taught us, gathering is vital for growing Christians. Every Lord's Day, we gather in obedience to Christ—to proclaim the gospel, to worship God, and to minister grace and peace to one another.

Thus, the church is defined by its gathering. At the same time, the gathered assembly should gather as *one* assembly, not many. In next week's blogpost, I will show from Scripture why this is the case. But for now, let me simply say that our conviction to gather as one congregation is hindered every time we gather in two services. Our practice of having two services does not match our biblical theology, and that is why gathering outside as one body is so desirable. Not only does it give each member the chance to gather with the whole congregation, but it affirms the truth that we are one body in Christ. More on that next week.

If our primary reason for going outside is theological, our second reason is evangelistic. By gathering outside, we testify to the grace and truth of God to all those whom might stop by. Additionally, the public assembly of 200 people—on Easter it was closer to 300—bears witness to something. When a crowd gathers, people wonder why. And when a church gathers outdoors, we bear witness in public to the fact that Christ rose from the grave and we are here to sing and shout about it!

In a day when people are sheltering in their homes and many churches are online only (read: not obeying Christ's command to gather), the public witness of the church is needed more than ever. It is true that our local assembly does not compensate for all the churches that are not meeting, but it might spur others on to gather. And certainly, if bold and public witness for the truth is lacking, then we should play our part to assemble and announce, Christ is Lord! Last year, meeting outside furnished many conversations with passers-by, as well as conversations with Christians, at other churches. This year we are praying for the same.

Third, gathering outside in one service reduces the load on church members. While our musicians, leaders, nursery workers, and teachers joyfully lead two services each Sunday, this ministry is taxing when it is compounded week after week. Accordingly, having one service lightens the load for a period of time, such that all of the members can return in the fall recharged to pursue an increased workload for ministry—mark it down, NextGen Kids starts on August 31. Just as God has created a world with seasons, the life of the church runs best with seasons too. And during the summer, one outdoor service gives a little more breathing room—both literally and figuratively.

On this point of going outside, we should mention a few changes. Last year, due to COVID, we did not use the building at all. This year, we will. While our outdoor service will begin at 8:30am, our Sunday School hour will begin at 10:30am. Except for a few weeks when Sunday School is paused for rest and training in late July and August (more details to come), we will have adult and children's Sunday School each Sunday. After a time of fellowship and transition (from 10:00am to 10:30am), we will have an hour of Sunday School each week. The thought behind this space between our worship service and Sunday School, is to give a special window for fellowship and to allow for time to bring in chairs and equipment.

Finally, the last note for the summer relates to childcare during the service. Like last year, we will not have childcare during the worship service, but we will have childcare during Sunday School. This ensures that all are able to gather and worship outside. At the same time, if weather causes us to move indoors, we will offer childcare during both services. This will take a little work for coordination, and a few more volunteers (on that see [Sean Oxford](#)), but with communication that will go out each weekend, we should be able to meet needs for all our families. With this in mind, please give close attention to email announcements and website and app updates as we may need to confirm details from week to week.

On this point, families with younger children are a gift to OBC. We welcome the noises and busyness of their presence. In fact, we have written [here](#) and [here](#) on ways to bring little ones into service. And over the next week or two, we will offer a few more thoughts on how to include children in service.

All in all, we are excited to make use of our parking lot in the summer months to worship God together. We pray that our public assembly will both encourage the saints and bear witness to the lost. Christ is worthy of all our praise. And this summer we look forward again to bringing that praise outdoors.

If you have further questions, please reach out to me or to anyone of the elders.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David