

## Communication on East White Oak Bible Church Groups of 10 or fewer meeting together

The elders of East White Oak have determined that it is now appropriate for groups of 10 or fewer to be able to meet together. There are some clear guidelines that we have established. Please do not consider these guidelines to be optional. They have been carefully thought through to enable meeting, while being kept safe. In every case, where the term “small group” is used below, the term means any group of 10 or fewer that meets together under the name of East White Oak Bible Church, whether they meet at church or in homes.

### *Small Group Life*

Gathering together is essential in the life of the church. We treasure other ministries of our church and remain hopeful that the summer months will bring more safety in terms of gathering for worship and in groups larger than 10. This situation is extremely fluid, and we could go to greater freedom of gathering together soon. However, we could also go back into greater distancing. Please go to our website for the latest information. We also provide a Facebook video released on Fridays to give you the latest on the upcoming weekend of ministry.

We also strongly urge you to give the judgment of charity when it comes to all matters related to COVID-19 and “re-opening”. Think the best of your brothers and sisters, especially those who decide differently on when it is right to start attending in-person small groups. We all desire to give glory to Christ, love our neighbor, value worship, and care about human life. Furthermore, we are united by the same Lord, faith, and baptism ([Ephesians 4:5](#)). Keep loving each other well. As our Lord said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” ([John 13:35](#)). Let us continue to shine His light before the world. Let us together grow to maturity in Christ.

### *A Caution*

Even while taking precautions, we recognize there is only so much control we will have or desire to exercise over individual behavior in the building. We are providing direction, and church officers and staff will strive to be an example of safe interactions within the building, but those who attend small groups, either at church or in homes, will need to be comfortable with possible uncertainties. We cannot guarantee every person’s behavior will be to everyone’s liking. We do ask that everyone be particularly sensitive to love and care for one’s neighbor. What you think is safe may be really bothersome to another. Please keep that in mind.

### *Who Should Come to Small Groups?*

Only those who are healthy and comfortable with attending an in-person small group should consider doing so at this time. To be clear, we intend to keep the video conferencing available for all small groups. Stay at home if you or a member of your household is symptomatic, have a fever, have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, or have traveled internationally or to a domestic hot spot in the prior two weeks.

**Our immunocompromised congregants and older individuals should not attend and should continue video conferencing their small groups. Parents of Junior High and Senior High students need to make**

**their own family decisions regarding their student's participation in youth small groups. Video conferencing will continue to be an option for all small groups.**

We understand that some will not feel comfortable joining in-person small group gatherings. That is understandable, and we don't want any to violate their conscience. These are unique times. It is not an issue of maturity in Christ for one to attend or to continue video conferencing. Freedom of conscience and extending grace towards others is especially important to uphold and pursue in our current circumstances.

*How will we do this meeting of small groups?*

Here are our guidelines for meeting:

- a. The meeting must be 10 or fewer. Please do not go above that number for any reason. That number includes all people, including children in the group.
- b. These guidelines apply if you are a group gathering from East White Oak. We do not intend to govern other groups, but we do ask that if you are an East White Oak group that you follow these guidelines. This is true whether you meet together in a home or at the church campus.
- c. Any children must stay with their parents at all times. Yes, a child counts as a person. 😊
- d. People who do not live together under the same roof will need to maintain physical distancing of 6 feet or greater
- e. Wherever East White Oak groups meet, at homes or at church, people should wear masks when entering, exiting, or anytime walking within the house or church building or within six feet of others. We strongly encourage this use of masks. This is for the benefit of others, not for the benefit of the mask wearer. We will plan to have some masks available at church for those who do not have them, but we think that this will be a small number, as most people have masks.
- f. There should be no food or refreshments served at these small group events.
- g. Each group will need to schedule use of the church building in advance. If you do not schedule use in advance, you will not be able to use the church facility. Maps which highlight your designated area along with these guidelines will be given to the person making a reservation. That person is expected to pass this guidance along to all group members. We further expect that each adult in a group will have read these guidelines so that they know and understand these instructions.
- h. Each group will be restricted to use of the room reserved and the entrance/exit designated for that group and the restroom reserved for that space. Each group will need to reserve the time needed for their group and stick to that time. Amy is ready right now to begin this reservation system. We will make instructions available to every group that reserves space that will be specific to that space. You can contact Amy at: [amy@ewo.org](mailto:amy@ewo.org) or at the church phone number 309-454-3833.

- i. Enter and exit only the designated doors to the building for your meeting place. Do not wander around the building. Do not enter or exit at a door not designated for your group.
- j. Avoid connection with other groups in the building—do not mingle with other groups to avoid the number of contacts exceeding the “10 or fewer” number.
- k. Clean up after yourself, in the room that you use and in the restrooms—Bruce will have sanitation materials available in the designated rooms and in the restrooms. Bruce will also direct the continued cleaning of our facility in a professional way as well. We would urge that the host of any groups meeting in homes take measures to clean and disinfect before and after group meetings, just we do at church.
- l. No use of the long hallway, except as it may be used for entry and exit and restroom use designated for the banquet room space—this is to avoid the mingling of groups.

*When will we do this?*

We will begin taking reservations for small group gatherings at the church on Tuesday May 26, and groups will be able to use our church campus for meetings of groups 10 or fewer by Friday May 29.

*Why so many “rules”?*

We are so sorry that this is true. It is a lot of guidelines. There are several reasons. First, we want to be as safe and in compliance with current established safety precautions regarding the virus as possible while still being able to meet. Second, there are always people who want to stretch the rules. Please don’t be that person. We know that many think that all of this is silly and exaggerated. But COVID-19 is real and highly contagious. It is especially harmful to people who are older. We urge you out of love for your neighbor and your brother and sister in Christ not to flaunt your freedom here. Third, we are trying to write this for a wide range of groups from Junior High to senior citizens. The more diverse the group is, the more clearly that guidelines need to be spelled out precisely.

*What is our goal in meeting in groups of 10 or fewer?*

The goal is to grow to maturity in Christ by gathering together. This is biblical. See Acts 2:42-47. We miss out on the dynamic of Christian discipleship when we are not able to meet. We now have this opportunity and look forward to seeing how the Lord will use this opportunity in our church life. This goal is true regardless of the group that meets. A junior high group meets to grow to maturity in Christ. Our small group ministry groups meet to grow to maturity in Christ. The elders or the deacons or the outreach team or the care team meet to grow to maturity in Christ. So, as your group contemplates meeting, we urge you to pray that your meeting will enable each member to grow to maturity in Christ.

With prayers for your safety and your encouragement and maturity in Christ,

Pastor Scott

For the elders of East White Oak Bible Church