

May 21, 2020

Dear Church Family,

I want to communicate to you some of the specifics regarding the reopening of the church on June 07. As I stated last week, one of our guiding principles is that the speed with which we reopen is less important than it is to reopen in such a way that we provide as best we can for the safety of all. To that end, we are being mindful of your health needs, concerns, and issues in preparation for a non-touch experience. The church will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized each week before we gather for worship. The Harpers do a great job cleaning our facility, and they have a plan and supplies in place to assure the ongoing necessary cleaning.

Here are some things to expect as we return for worship on June 07:
Outside doors will be opened and closed for you by a deacon wearing gloves/masks. The foyer will have a limited amount of furniture in order to facilitate social distancing. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be strategically placed around the building. Automatic (hand sensor) paper towel dispensers are being installed in restrooms. Restroom use will be restricted to one person at a time.

Deacons will be available in the foyer to answer questions, and to distribute any necessary materials, such as the church newsletter or communion elements on Lord's Supper Sundays. Again, they will wear masks and gloves. You are strongly encouraged to wear a mask as well in order to further protect your fellow worshippers. There will be masks available in the foyer if you forget yours.

As previously announced, there will be no Sunday School for the immediate future. Extended Session for preschoolers during worship will not be provided for now.

A receptacle will be placed next to the entrance to the sanctuary in which you can place your offering as you enter or exit the sanctuary. The doors to the sanctuary will be propped open at all times. In order to aid in social distancing, some of the pews will be roped off. You are encouraged to sit by families and to allow at least 6 feet between families on the same pew. We will not use a church bulletin as such. Announcements will be verbally announced, and the announcements will appear on the two large screens.

There will be no choir for the time being. We will have some congregational singing, with congregants wearing their facemask while singing. All items in the pew racks have been removed. Words to the hymns and other music will appear, per usual, on the video screens.

We will have a Fellowship Greeting during the service, but it will be a smile, wave, verbal greeting, while remaining in our pew (no handshaking or hugging before during, or after the service).

There will be no Kids Korner. We are exploring the possibility of a brief video appropriate for children on at least some Sundays. We will have the communal prayer time, but we will again remain at our place, and not use the prayer benches. After the benediction, we will dismiss by rows in order to avoid crowding in the aisles and in the foyer. In the same spirit, we would ask you not to linger in the foyer, but to exit into the parking lot and visit there, maintaining social distancing.

For those persons who are unable to return to the church right away due to health concerns directly related to the coronavirus, we will provide a DVD/CD to you early in the week following the Sunday service, until you are able to return.

VBS 2020 has been canceled and the theme and material will be carried over to 2021. The Wednesday evening program will hopefully resume the Wednesday following Labor Day (September 09).

We are asking you to please refrain from attending worship at the church on any Sunday in which you had any of the following symptoms during the week: fever over 100, persistent cough or sore throat, shortness of breath, contact with anyone confirmed to have COVID-19 (in past 14 days).

That is a lot to take in. We will provide much of this same material in the newsletter this next week. If you have questions, do not hesitate to pose them.

I suspect we have a wide range of opinions about how and when we open up the church, running the spectrum from some desiring that we return immediately to life at church as it was pre-pandemic, to those persons who fear opening back up the church right now whatever the precautions we may take. That is understandable. Next week, I plan to address the importance of communicating grace to one another . . . to be understanding of one another, and to continue lifting one another and the church up to our precious Lord.

A verse I shared with our reopening planning group is 1 Corinthians 14:40, where we are exhorted, "all things should be done decently and in order." This verse is found in the context of worship, but the principle of doing everything "in order" before the Lord, is valid in general for us as believers, and as a church, and specifically as concerns the reopening of the church.

I appreciate each one of you and value your place in the life of our church. May the Lord bless and guide us to wisely reopen the church building. And may our heart's desire be to continue, as a church, to be a brightly shining lighthouse in this increasingly dark world.

In Him,

Pastor Dennis