

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR BUILDING RE-OPENING AND USE DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC
First Presbyterian Church of Warren, Ohio
May 21, 2020

In Chapter Three of Ecclesiastes, we learn that God has a time for everything, including a time to open the building for worship and a time to remain safe in our homes.¹ As the Ohio government begins the Stay Safe Ohio Directives on re-opening the economy and resuming business, religious services, and cultural events, the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Warren has approved the following policy and procedures for providing for scheduled worship in the church building. This policy and corresponding procedures are based on information from numerous sources, including but not limited to Eastminster Presbytery and the PC(USA) denomination.² **We realize that this document can be rescinded in full or in part based on public health information or new directives from our denominational governing bodies.**

THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT: When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?”, He summarized them all by saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, and your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.”³ The basis of Jesus’ ministry is love and reconciliation. Like the Good Samaritan, this love that Jesus models for us extends to the neighbor we know and the neighbor we don’t know.⁴ Hence, we make sacrifices and care in unexpected and counter-cultural ways. In today’s society, that love and caring extends to social/physical distancing, wearing masks, and washing our hands frequently so that the Covid-19 virus may be contained and mitigated.

At the same time, we are called to worship and praise God; in fact, this is the first instruction of the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms.⁵ Furthermore, God has created us to be in community; not until God created both male and female was creation declared very good.⁶ Ecclesiastes continues by proclaiming the value of community.⁷ Humanity is created to be in community to worship God. Furthermore, the PC(USA) Constitution proclaims in its opening paragraphs that “Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.”⁸

During this pandemic, we cannot worship together in the same space without parameters and procedures that protect our neighbors and ourselves from the potential of spreading this disease. In an effort to live into the mission of the Reformed Church of providing that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard, that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received, and that there is the nurturing of the covenant community of disciples of Christ, the Session endorses the following policy

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

²https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning_to_public_worship_may_2020.pdf and <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58a0ac54197aeac626dea814/t/5eb2da2a777699291a450195/1588779562445/Letters+to+Presbytery+May+6+2020.pdf> through <https://www.eastminsterpresbytery.org/covid19-updates-resources> and <https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

³ Matthew 22: 37-40.

⁴ Luke 10:25-37.

⁵ PC(USA) *Book of Confessions*, 7.001 and 7.111.

⁶ Genesis 1: 31.

⁷ Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12.

⁸ PC(USA) *Book of Order* 2019/2020 F-1.01

and supporting procedures that demonstrate our sacrificial love of our triune God, for our neighbors, and for ourselves.

POLICY: The Session will approve the opening of the church sanctuary for real time worship with specific parameters in place to protect members and staff utilizing the recommendations of the Ohio government and denominational governing bodies. Broadcast worship will continue through various platforms based on technological capabilities.

PROCEDURES:

1. The Session will determine the opening date of the building for various activities including worship, group meetings, weddings, funerals, and any additional requests.
 - a. This determination will be based on the most recent public health information and directives from the denominational governing bodies.
 - b. This action to open or close can be based on electronic votes, Zoom meetings, in-person meetings, and/or a combination based on the public health situation.
2. Worship- Live Streaming worship through Facebook and Radio Broadcast worship will continue.
 - a. Worship re-opening will initially begin with a limit of 50 family units. A family unit is defined as any person(s) co-habiting under one roof; this does not include extended families who domicile in different homes. This number will increase as directed by the Session in accordance with Ohio government regulations and denominational governing body directives.
 - b. Six feet minimum must separate each family unit in the pews in each direction.
 - c. Each person must wear a mask for the entire service. Masks will be provided if needed.
 - d. Attendance is voluntary. Worshippers should attend worship only if each person is comfortable with being in the presence of others. Risk continues to exist for those gathering in a group.
 - e. Persons who should not attend:
 - i. Those in the vulnerable category of having a pre-existing co-morbidity and/or above the age of 65 years of age
 - ii. Those caring for a person in the vulnerable category
 - iii. Those with fever and/or feeling ill
 - f. Children and youth in attendance under the age of 18 years must sit with their parents/guardian for the entire service.
 - i. A children's message will be provided, but children will remain in their seats in the pews for this.
 - g. Hymns will be played, but singing in the sanctuary will not be a part of the worship service.
 - h. Musical selections will be limited to instrumental pieces by piano, organ, string, and/or percussion.
 - i. Once the church is re-opened, only pre-recorded vocal solos will be included in the worship service. The choir will not sing during the summer.⁹
 - j. The offering will not be collected by passing plates. An *enclosed* container will be provided to deposit your offering as you enter or exit.
 - i. Offerings can be mailed to the church office.
 - ii. The Finance Committee is working on the potential for direct deposit and on-line payment.

⁹ "Visualized Speech-Generated Oral Fluid Droplets with Laser Lighted Scattering." *NEJM* 4.15.20.

- k. The passing of the peace will be done while worshippers remain at their seats; there will not be any moving around, handshaking, or hugging.
 - l. Bulletins will not be provided in attempt to be paper free and to minimize the spread the virus. The bulletins will be posted on the website and can be downloaded and brought to church.
 - m. Hymnals, pew Bibles, fellowship pads, and other papers in the pew racks will not be accessible. Scripture passages will be posted on the screen.
 - n. Communion and baptisms will not be celebrated for the foreseeable future.
 - o. Worship will not be preceded nor followed by a fellowship hour. Worshippers should arrive close to the start time and leave promptly after worship according to the exit plan.
 - p. Greeters will not be present. Ushers will be present to assist with emergencies as needed.
3. Children's Ministry
- a. A children's message will be provided during worship with children remaining in their pew seats. Children's activities bags will not be available.
 - b. VBS at the church will not take place this summer.
 - c. No Sunday School will take place until further notice.
 - d. Nursery will not be provided until further notice.
4. Building Provisions
- a. All water fountains will be disconnected. Please bring your own water bottle if needed.
 - b. Coffee, tea, other drinks, and/or donuts and bagels will not be provided.
 - c. Hand sanitizer will be provided in each pew and at the entrance and exit doors.
 - d. Entrance and exit doors will be propped open as appropriate for arrival and departure.
 - e. A two-person combination of the Facilities Manager, Facility Attendant, and assigned volunteer will be present to monitor safety and to be sanitizing surfaces in real time.
 - f. Bathrooms on the sanctuary floor of the building will be open continually during worship and sanitized before and after building is opened and closed.
 - g. The first two rows of pews directly in front of the lectern, pulpit, and communion table will remain empty.
 - h. Pews will be sanitized after each worship service.

Reviewed and approved by Session May 20, 2020
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