



September 15, 2020

Dear Friends,

COVID-19 slammed our sanctuary doors shut six months ago. Following the advice of public health officials plus two infectious disease physicians within our congregation, we decided to temporarily suspend in-person worship. We immediately switched to recording a weekly worship service and providing it online.

At the time, I was hopeful that we might be able to reopen sometime in the summer. As the months dragged on, it became apparent that we would not be able to resume worship as before (singing, passing the peace, or having close personal contact) any time soon.

Over the past few months, scientists have gained a better understanding of the various ways this disease is transmitted and have informed the public of risky behaviors that make us more susceptible to contracting it. I, for one, have learned more about the transmission of respiratory droplets than I thought I would ever need to know!

Since we closed our building, I have felt a mighty tension between a strong desire to resume in-person worship and to protect the safety of our members. Eventually, this led to experimenting with an in-person worship service on the front lawn that limited the number of participants and required masks and social distancing. After six weeks, it has proven a success and laid the foundation for returning to in-person worship in our sanctuary.

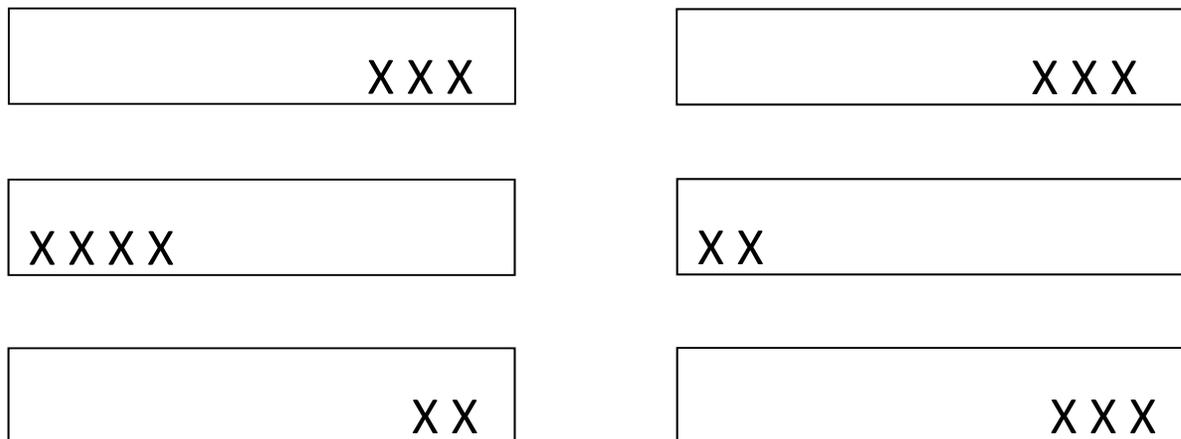
Last Wednesday evening, the members of our Session weighed the risk factors and affirmed numerous safety guidelines for reopening our sanctuary. The Session voted unanimously to **reopen our sanctuary on Sunday mornings for one worship service at 9:00 a.m. beginning Sunday, October 18**. This date was chosen because we should be out of the season when we need air conditioning which blows air throughout the sanctuary – including those pesky little respiratory droplets that could potentially carry disease!

Here are the guidelines that the Session has established:

- Anyone who feels ill should not enter the building.
- Attendance will be limited to 48 reservations (1-5 people) and an online reservation will be required.
- Anyone who enters our building over the age of five must wear a mask.
- As you enter, please use the no-touch sanitizing stations located near the doors and in the hallways.
- People may occupy the sanctuary and main hallway leading to the sanctuary, but all other parts of the building will be off limits, except for Rodney Chapel, which will be the drop-off spot for sandwich and fruit donations to Emmanuel Dining Room.
- Everyone must practice social distancing by keeping a space of at least six feet between themselves and non-family members.

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- You will only be able to enter the sanctuary through the narthex (the back of the sanctuary) by way of the main hallway, the pavilion, or the bell tower. No one should enter or exit through the side transept door.
- For safety, the ushers will show you where you sit. To prevent people from walking near others who are already seated, ushers will lead worshipers to fill the side transepts first. They will fill the pews from back to front.
- After the transepts are full, seating will begin in the nave (the middle section of the sanctuary). People will fill the pews from the front to the back.
- In the balcony, worshipers will fill the pews from the second pew from the rail to the back pew.
- Only one reservation (1 – 5 people) will be permitted to sit on a pew (to the left or the right side) in alternating pews. The seating will look something like this:



- Our four choristers will sing hymns and anthems, but sadly, there will be no choir or congregational singing until the pandemic ends. The choristers will sing from behind plexiglass.
- Bibles, hymnals, and Friendship/attendance pads will be removed from the sanctuary. In place of passing an offering plate, there will be offering boxes for your tithes and gifts.
- At the conclusion of the service, worshipers will exit the nave from the back to the front (to prevent people walking past others). Worshipers will exit the side transepts (through the narthex) from front to back after all worshipers in the nave have left the sanctuary.
- Upon exiting the sanctuary, please leave the building. You may want to have a conversation with others you have missed during the lockdown. We ask that you please meet them on the Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalk or lawn, the 13th Street sidewalk, or the parking lot, maintaining the required six-foot social distancing, while continuing to wear your mask.
- Restrooms in the main hallway will be open, but restricted to one person at a time.
- If you or someone in your family should test positive for COVID-19 after attending worship, please contact Sudie or me immediately so that we can contact everyone who attended worship that day.



As you know, during this pandemic, no church, grocery, office, or any other place can provide a guarantee against contracting COVID-19. However, I believe that if we follow these steps (which comply with the church reopening orders issued by Governor John Carney), we should dramatically lessen the possibility of spreading illness.

I know that some of you will not return to the sanctuary to worship until a vaccine is available. That is completely understandable; no one should feel pressured into attending worship in person. We will continue to provide a recorded online service each week.

Thank you for your devotion to Westminster and your care of each other.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg".

Gregory Knox Jones
Senior Pastor/Head of Staff