



November 17, 2020

Dear Friends,

You may recall that three weeks ago (you *can* remember that far back, right?), I asked you to help us figure out the best Christmas Eve worship schedule for the upcoming COVID Christmas. My Tuesday message provided a link to a brief survey to discover what members of our church family were thinking about attending worship on Christmas Eve. Thank you to all 107 of you who responded.

The first question was: *Will you attend an in-person worship service on Christmas Eve?* The results: 50% answered "No," 26% said "Yes," and 24% answered "Maybe."

The second question was: *If you answered "Yes" to question 1, which time(s) would you come?* 58% said 8:00 p.m., 42% said 5:30 p.m., and 21% said 10:00 p.m. (these don't add up to 100% because people had the option of listing more than one time).

The third question was: *If you answered "No" or "Maybe" to question 1, please let us know what factors affect your decision.*

The overwhelming majority of those who said they would not attend indoor worship was due to concerns for their health during the pandemic. A handful said they would be out of town. Many of the "Maybes" said it depended on whether the number of COVID-19 cases was rising or declining. Finally, several said that until there is a vaccine, they will not attend worship in person, but will continue to watch our worship services online.

Based on your responses, we decided to have **one in-person worship service on Christmas Eve at 8:00 p.m. and a pre-recorded service at 4:00 p.m.** Our 8:00 p.m. service will be a traditional service with Christmas carols sung by our choristers, music for handbells, a four-hand piano duo, and I will preach a Christmas message. Our 4:00 p.m. service will include our storytellers, youth instrumentalists, and a Watch Party.

Much about Christmas will be different this year due to this awful COVID-19. Not only have we had to reimagine worship, but our annual Christmas Box Project for people in need has also required a major overhaul. There will be no "Wish Stars" to pluck off Christmas trees and we will not be collecting canned goods, stuffing, and cereal. However, you still have the opportunity to share the Christmas spirit and bring a measure of joy to 312 children and adults.

In place of "Wish Stars" gifts, we ask you to make a financial contribution toward a Walmart gift card. In place of food, we ask you to contribute toward a ShopRite gift card. You will find more information in the *Weekly Word* e-newsletter and the online bulletin. Please send your check or go online by **Sunday, December 13.**

The *Weekly Word* and online bulletin also provide information about Christmas poinsettias in memory of, or in honor of, loved ones. The deadline for your contribution is **Thursday, December 10.**

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With coronavirus cases rising in nearly every state and in much of the world, this will be a very different Thanksgiving and Christmas. Many of us will not gather with family and friends. Earlier today, Governor Carney announced tighter restrictions on indoor gatherings. Indoor gatherings in homes are limited to 10 people. Beginning next Monday (November 23), we will be limited to 50 people in our sanctuary. This will reduce the number of people we can permit in worship, as our attendance has fluctuated between 65 and 85.

I remain concerned that the number of cases will continue to rise through the holidays. However, with the news that pharmaceutical companies seem to have created a very effective vaccine, next year should be much more promising. We live in hope.

Of course, we are not there yet, so we cannot give in to coronavirus fatigue. I hope you will be vigilant about wearing a mask, maintaining a safe distance from those outside of your household, and frequently washing your hands.

May all of us do our part to limit the spread of this highly contagious disease.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg", written in a cursive style.

Gregory Knox Jones  
*Senior Pastor/Head of Staff*

P.S. If you wish to join us for in-person worship in the sanctuary this Sunday, November 22, please [click here](#) to make a reservation.