

June 26, 2020

Dear First Church Family,

We are all anxious to begin worshipping together again. We agree strongly with David when he said, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Psalm 122:1). But we wish it was that simple.

As the leaders of God’s flock we have a spiritual responsibility to take seriously reopening in the midst of a pandemic to safeguard our flock from unnecessary danger. We want to follow the guidelines given to us by government and medical authorities as much as we are able and believe best for our flock.

As we gather we will all have to make some adjustments to our habits and schedule. We appreciate your patience with the necessary speed bumps required as things slowly return to normal. At first things will look and feel a bit different, but it will be wonderful to honor the Lord’s Day together once more. Praise God for his mercies! What follows are the details of our plan as we know it now.

First, starting July 5, we will have two identical morning services at 9 am and 11 am. The congregation has been divided alphabetically, by last names, roughly according to care districts. We know this is not ideal, but please note your assigned service. If this assigned time is a significant hardship for you or your family you may come to the other service. During the hour in between, touchable surfaces will be cleaned.

9:00 AM service: last names A – K.

11:00 AM service: last names L – Z.

On July 12 we will reverse the order:

9:00 AM service: last names L – Z.

11:00 AM service: last names A – K.

Second, about our livestream: If you have any hesitations about attending in-person services, please feel free to continue worshipping from home. A livestream of our second (11:00 AM) Sunday service will be available throughout the summer. The link is on our webpage, on our Facebook page and in the weekly email bulletin.

Third, the following individuals should not attend:

- Those who are symptomatic, if you have a cough, fever, or diarrhea. A fever is any temperature 100 or above.
- Those who live with a family member or friend who is symptomatic. Please do not attend worship until everyone in your household has fully recovered.

We are concerned for your safety and believe there are some for whom it would be inadvisable to return to worship even in early July. We urge you to use sober judgment when making your decision when to return. If you would like counsel from a pastor or elder, please call one of us.

Fourth, concerning worship details:

- No childcare, children’s church, or education classes: we’re sorry, but this is necessary. Those needing to leave the service with small children or for any other reason may go downstairs. The service will be shown in both the basement fellowship hall and in the council room. The balcony will be open.
- Entering the building we will have the front doors propped open. There will be no greeters. Please do not linger or congregate in the narthex, but take your seat.

- For safe distancing every other row of pews will be blocked off. Household units may sit together, otherwise leave some space between you and others. You will likely not get your “usual” seat, so please understand and make allowances for one another.
- Safe distancing is necessary: Please, no shaking hands or hugs. Stay six feet apart. Please keep hand sanitizer in your car and have family all wash hands before entering building. Cover your mouth with your arm if you sneeze or cough.
- Facemasks are encouraged but not required as long as safe distance is maintained. Extra facemasks will be available at the information table in the lobby.
- Please bring your own Bible and pen/pencil. The Bibles, hymnals, pew cushions and pencils have all been removed from the pews.
- Bulletins will be in your church mail box, or on the information table, and emailed to you.
- Offering baskets will be near the exit doors for use on the way in and out of the sanctuary. You may also continue to use online giving or mail/drop donations off at the church-office during the week.
- There will be no fellowship time following the services.
- All touchable surfaces in the sanctuary, narthex, and restrooms will be sanitized before and after each service.
- There were early reports that singing could increase infection, but time and further research has shown this is likely not the case. Nevertheless, we will limit our singing to three songs: one at the beginning, one in the middle and one at the end.

Please leave immediately following the service to allow for cleaning between services. Again please don't linger or congregate in the narthex. Conversations are encouraged to take place in a safe location outdoors and away from the building entrances.

Fifth, concerning evening service. We have decided to begin slowly and see how things go for a few weeks. We are also aware each service requires more of our volunteers for cleaning, sound and music. We anticipate when we are able to have one morning service, we will resume the evening service.

We, as elders, will meet again on July 14 to see how things have gone the first two Sundays and make adjustments as needed. Please be patient as we make our way forward in these extraordinary times we are living through. Be patient with us and each other. Let us have gratitude for the freedoms and protections we do have and for all that God has mercifully done for us. Give thanks that our congregation has been safe and well and provided for.

In all we do let's heed Paul's good words in Philippians:

Philippians 2:1-4 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

With you in His service for His glory,

First Church Elders