

Developing a Plan for the Resumption of In-Person Worship

Church sessions in the presbytery are doing thoughtful and prayerful work as they consider when and how they will resume in-person worship, reviewing their individual situations in light of their size and location, as well as the risks posed to them. What is possible for one congregation may not be so for another.

Critical to resuming in-person worship is the development and communication of a plan. Effective plans will reflect the needs of their congregations and the local environments and should include consultation with your insurance carrier. While there is no “one-size-fits-all plan,” there are certain elements that plans should contain, such as:

- ◇ A pastoral/theological statement to introduce the plan
- ◇ A date for resuming in-person worship (or how the date will be determined if still unsure)
- ◇ Strong advice to those in vulnerable groups to continue to worship at home
- ◇ Continuation, if at all possible, of virtual worship for those who do not yet feel safe attending in-person worship
- ◇ Is out-door worship possible? What if it rains?
- ◇ How will you maintain physical distancing?
 - Ingress/Egress plan
 - Maximum number of people allowed, and how will this be handled if needed?
 - Roping off pews or spacing seats
 - Extra distance from or shield for Preacher? Liturgist? Soloist?
- ◇ What other measures will be taken to protect one another?
 - A statement that those who have a fever, who feel ill, or who have had exposure to someone with COVID-19 should stay home
 - Masks? Will they be provided if worshiper doesn't have one?
 - No hymn singing? How will special music be handled?
- ◇ How will you limit exposure to commonly-touched surfaces?
 - Will Communion be served? If so, how?
 - How will the offering be collected?
 - Will doors stay open if possible? Or will one person open and close doors?
 - How will restroom availability be handled?
- ◇ How will other Sunday morning activities be handled?
 - Will there be day care? (we recommend that you do not)
 - Will there be church school? (we recommend that you do not)
- ◇ How will the building be cleaned between services?
- ◇ What other in-person groups, if any, will be allowed to meet?
 - Who approves?
 - How will the above concerns be addressed?
- ◇ A commitment to review the plan frequently and regularly.

We acknowledge that this is a daunting list, and it highlights the risks of in-person worship. We strongly support any session that makes a decision to delay the resumption of in-person worship beyond June 21.

Some sessions have already developed and begun to communicate their plans. See attached the plan from the Session of Greencastle Presbyterian Church. We invite sessions who wish to share their plans to send a .doc or .pdf file to the presbytery office (office@presbyteryov.org), and we will post it to the website. We are not in the position to review or give guidance on specific plans. We recommend that you check with your local health department and/or your insurance company.

We acknowledge that whenever in-person worship resumes, it will be a time of joy for the possibilities to reconnect face-to-face. At the same time, however, we may experience grief for what has been lost and what cannot be regained until there is resolution for the virus that has disrupted our lives. We conclude with these words from "Returning to Public Worship Theological and Practical Considerations," available on the PCUSA website:

We may make mistakes along the way. There will surely be awkward moments as we adjust to new protocols and practices. There will be times of frustration, disappointment, and grief. We will have countless opportunities to exercise the spiritual gifts of patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

But there will also be blessings. There will be wonderful surprises, great celebrations, and moments of deep satisfaction. We will get to see glimpses of the new thing God is doing, even now. We will have opportunities to savor the spiritual gifts of love, joy, peace, generosity, and faithfulness.

Let us be faithful, then—to God and to one another—as we receive the gifts and work through the challenges of this time in the life of our congregation and world. Let us be guided by the Word, responsive to the Spirit, and open to the grace of God. Let us remember that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.



Worship As We Move Forward

How We Can Care for One Another on Sundays

First, we want to thank you for all the ways you've continued to "be the church" in this time. Secondly, we want to provide some helpful words on how we can care for each other moving forward.

Sunday –May 10th through at least Sunday, May 31st: "Safer at home"

We will continue to worship as we have been by live-streaming our services on YouTube

Down the road: "Safely distant"

When we sense that it is safer for us to return, we will begin opening our doors for those less susceptible to the virus and who feel free to worship in a smaller gathering – paying special attention to keeping our distance from one another. Imagining our gatherings will be around or below 50 persons, we will make sure that those who do gather for worship can do so with care for each other. We won't be having our normal fellowship time, and we encourage everyone to be mindful of washing hands and using wipes to open bathroom doors. When we do gather, we're also letting these reminders guide us:

"Let Love Guide Us" – Ongoing Reminders:

- ***Love your neighbor***
 - stay home if you feel sick or have any symptoms
 - stay home if there is any possibility you have been exposed recently
- ***On-line worship will continue***
 - Governor Holcomb encourages anyone who is over 65 or who has pre-existing conditions to continue utilizing the on-line option
 - do what allows you to worship freely and without excessive concern – whether that be with us or at home
- ***Separate even when together***
 - care for one another by spacing throughout pews and maintaining at least 6 ft between yourself and those around you (exempting immediate family, of course)
 - being mindful not only of your personal "comfort" zone but also what your neighbors may be comfortable with
- ***Limit touches = limit exposure***
 - doors will be propped open where possible

- a donation plate will be placed at the entrance of the sanctuary as well as the front table
- “passing the peace” will involve only signs and gestures from a safe distance
- communion will not be served in worship until we come up with a safe way to do so
- bottles of hand sanitizer will be available in each pew and throughout building, please use as needed and to clean anything you may have touched (hymnals, pews, etc.)

Like the early Church, we offer these guidelines so that our common worship can be something that is life-giving for all of us, paying special attention to those around us and their concerns and desires.

Even further down the road: “Safely interactive”

Knowing that we will not be returning to “normal” anytime soon, any of our activities that are more interactive will likely look different – including communion and fellowship time. As we figure out ways to make these key parts of our life together possible, we will let everyone know. Finally, here are some answers to questions you may have:

- ***When we return, should I wear a face mask?***
 - Yes, we are asking everyone to wear a face-mask out of care for each other
- ***What about child-care on Sunday mornings?***
 - When we slowly re-open, we will still invite families to stay together on Sunday as possible or to join us via our Live-stream if that works better for your family. We will let everyone know when we offer child-care.
- ***What about kids’ Sunday School?***
 - Again, we won’t plan to have children’s Sunday school as we initially re-open but will let everyone know in the future when we do offer it again
- ***What about adult Sunday School?***
 - Right now, we’re encouraging groups to continue meeting on-line via Zoom, but if and when Bible studies do get together, we encourage everyone to maintain safe distancing and to limit exposure by sanitizing your areas after meeting (wiping tables and chairs)

Again, thanks for all the ways you’ve been so patient, understanding and supportive during this time. Let us know if you have any other questions, and may we continue to be the church for our community and world! Sincerely,

~Your Team of Elders

Paul Jedele

Linda Clute

Tom Webb

Lynne Ayers

Margo Thomas

Mark McKee

Saraellen Peters

Clay Mannering

Doug Miller

Wes Kendall