

The First Presbyterian Church

1324 Marion Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

June 16, 2020

Dear Church Family,

On Monday, June 15, the Session agreed on a plan for re-entry into in-person worship to begin on **Sunday, June 28**. The Worship, Music and Sacraments Committee has spent many hours deliberating how to accomplish re-entry in a manner that is both wise and safe for everyone. Allow me to draw attention to the fact that everyone has a point of view about this season, and that includes the Session. But in the interests of unity and care for one another, an abundance of caution will be put in place. The Session is indebted to the Worship, Music and Sacraments Committee as well as those who continue to serve on the COVID-19 Ad Hoc Commission.

As you read, please keep in mind the phased nature of this reopening. We anticipate changes as the weeks and months pass by. As time passes, and epidemiological trends continue to improve, the Session will make further changes to get us back to some normalcy again. At this time, we are only addressing Sunday worship. In time, the Session hopes to lift restrictions and resume all the various meetings and church life that we miss so much.

- Beginning June 28, First Presbyterian Church will offer the following in-person worship services:
 - 8:30 am in the Family Life Center
 - 11:00 am (note not 11:15) in the Sanctuary
 - 6:00 pm in the Family Life Center
- All three services will be live-streamed.
- There will be a limit as to how many may enter each facility. There will be a **maximum of 300** attendees at each service, *but it may well be less, depending on the mix of families and singles*. This is a concession to current guidelines by CDC and DHEC for occupancy restrictions and social distancing requirements imposed on similar gatherings in the city. It is likely that you will not be able to gather in-person every week at this initial phase due to these restrictions. As a way of gauging a more exact number of how many will return immediately, a survey is attached to this communication.
- We are planning on having an on-line RSVP portal on the church website and church app. Congregants may attend **only one** of these services. *If you need assistance to register, please call the pastoral care line at (803) 513-7931.*
- Each member will be asked the following questions before gaining entry into the Family Life Center or Sanctuary:
 - Have you had contact with individuals with known COVID-19 infection?
 - Have you had fever or chills during the last 30 days?
 - Do you have a new cough or difficulty breathing?
 - Have you lost the sense of smell or taste?
- These questions will be posted outside the entrances. Anyone who answers “yes” will be urged to participate in the service at home.

- Temperatures will be taken at the entry point into the building employing a non-contact thermometer. Since this involves close proximity, **you will be asked to wear a mask for this procedure.**
- The following are encouraged **not** to attend for a season, but continue to participate online:
 - Those who fall into a high risk category according to the CDC, which includes individuals with: chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, immunocompromised (including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation), immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune-weakening medications, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and undergoing dialysis, and liver disease. (This will include members older than 65, but this is **not** a mandate.)
 - Those who are or have recently been sick
 - Children under five years old (little children cannot socially distance easily)
 - Those who have any symptoms of Coronavirus – fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell
- The Session strongly recommends the use of face masks while in the building. Bring your own face mask.
- Exterior entrances will open 30 minutes prior to each service.
- Members of the same household can sit together; however, social distancing must be maintained with other congregants. Worshipers will be ushered to their seats.
- There will be an orderly exit process (as in weddings), row by row, starting at the back of the building. Those sitting in the ground floor of the Sanctuary will exit through the front doors, and those in the balcony of the Sanctuary will exit via the side doors.

I know this is hard. The experience of worship will, I am certain, be strange. Some of you think this is, frankly, obsessive. In the interests of brotherly love and unity, I urge you to comply with these restrictions for now. Everything that we are doing falls in line with what other churches of our size are doing. And word on the street in Britain is that they will not return to worship until 2021! So, we are at least making some progress.

Should you decide to stay away for a season and continue participation via the live-stream, that is entirely your prerogative. It will not reflect spiritual superiority or inferiority. Let us all do what we can to love one another through this season. Let us be charitable and promote unity. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to demonstrate how much we love one another and how much we miss one another. I continue to count it a very special honor to serve our beloved congregation.

Your grateful servant,



Derek W. H. Thomas
Senior Minister