

Congregational Communication

Dear Spruce Creek Family,

I hope this communication finds you and your family well and staying safe. This has been a very challenging time, as we have been apart, living in a time of great uncertainty, and wondering what our next steps are, especially as we see states and others venturing forward to reopen. To that end I would like to communicate with you some of our, as a church, next steps toward reopening.

Several weeks ago, the Session appointed a task force consisting of Shane Bartholomew, Tom Hilgers, Sam Coffing and myself to explore options and come up with a proposal for the elders and deacons to approve concerning reopening. We met over several hours and came up with a proposal that the Session approved last evening. The proposal begins with words that I presented to both the task force and to our leadership. *“There are still so many unknowns and uncertainties. This is a very fluid situation. Every decision we make can be second guessed and controversial. My prayer is that as we go into this we will extend grace and practice humility (as there will be many different opinions in the congregation, some will be extremely confident and others more cautious. Some will want to come to church gatherings sooner than others). As we come to a mindset of living with COVID-19 my hope is that we approach this with much prayer, humility, and kindness, accepting those whose opinions might be different from our own.”*

And so now are the key points of what has been approved.

First, our plan is to begin a reopening this coming Sunday, May 17th, for one worship service beginning at 10:00am. The service will also be livestreamed on both Facebook Live and (this is very exciting) a new You Tube page (search Spruce Creek Presbyterian Church on the You Tube app). Vic’s Sunday School class will continue at 9:00 am through either Zoom or live outside in the pavilion area.

Here are some of the guidelines we are strongly encouraging. First, if you are 65 years old, or have any underlying health issues, or are in a vulnerable condition, we strongly advise you to stay home. I know we long to be together but there is abundant grace for any who choose to stay at home. Remember the wisdom of the Proverbs, “The prudent see danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it” (Proverbs 22:3).

Second, the elders will be calling their shepherding groups to see who will be attending. One of the things this will allow is for the deacons to know how to set up the sanctuary (and if necessary, the narthex, and outside for extra seating) ensuring physical distancing while allowing families to sit together. We do ask that you please follow the physical distancing protocols of more than six feet apart. We need to do this especially as we greet one another. We are a very friendly church that likes to give hugs and handshakes and we are asking that we forego all this for the sake of loving one another.

In that spirit I need to let you know that I need to be especially careful as to try to not bring this illness home to Evie, as she is in a high risk category. While others may have the choice not to attend I both need and want to fulfill my calling to preach the gospel to you. But I will only be coming in to the sanctuary to preach and then will be leaving right afterward. I need to guard Evie as best as I am able to keep her out of harm's way. I thank you for understanding my unique circumstances.

There will be no coffee or snack time, and no nursery or children's ministry. The playground area will be closed and locked. This means that parents will need to keep extra care with their children in order to ensure our physical distancing. Again, if you choose to stay at home and participate through the livestream we completely understand.

We will not be passing the offering plate. The offering plate will be in the narthex and Tom Hilgers will be standing six feet behind it for you to give your offering. All the same means of giving will also continue to stay in place.

We ask that after you are finished with the hymnals you place them on top of your chair, so we can disinfect them after each use. This helps our cleaning team. Thank you.

About the use of masks, I know this is controversial and there are various opinions. First, we obviously cannot and will not be enforcing the use of masks. But please allow me to share my pastoral counsel. I will be wearing a mask and I do encourage the use of masks. Here is why. It is not to protect ourselves. It is to protect others from ourselves. There is simply too much about this virus that we do not know. Thus, I believe this is an issue where we have the opportunity to deny ourselves and love one another. I know we have freedom. But from a biblical perspective what is the purpose of our freedom? It is to serve others. Paul writes, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

Lastly, this is a very fluid situation. We will be reviewing this each week and some things might change. This is merely our first attempt at trying to reopen things and be faithful to the Lord.

May God's grace and peace be with you all.

Pastor Jeff