

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" —Psalm 122:1

*God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will.*

Those are the words of William Cowper, the great English poet and hymn writer. The words of this hymn have been a great comfort to me throughout the years as they have reminded me of the sovereign purposes of God to rule and control all things. In the past year, however, these words have also been used by God to rebuke me. Let me explain by way of confession.

One year ago, when the word "COVID" entered into our daily vocabulary, I was not too concerned. I thought to myself, "This will be over in a few weeks." Then, when the weeks passed to months, I started to despair. Here's the confession part: my despair was quite selfish. I viewed COVID as a momentum killer for our church's health and growth. You see, at the time, I was very encouraged by what the Lord was doing at WPC and I believed that we were primed for significant growth that year (both spiritually and numerically). Then we stopped meeting in person for about eight weeks. When we did reconvene for public worship we did so with certain health and safety protocols in place which limited our capacity. I believe we made right decisions in doing so, but nevertheless it left me with a feeling of emptiness. I was convinced that not only would we miss many of our long-time members who needed to stay home because of health concerns, but I believed that we wouldn't see any new visitors for a long time.

Boy was I wrong! Rather than retracing all the ways the Lord has worked to bring so many new faces to WPC, let me simply share with you the lesson I learned: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The Lord does not need "ideal" conditions to cause his church to flourish. The Lord's work is not hindered by social distancing and seating capacities. The Lord's work does not end when we have to make use of "non-ideal" measures to conduct ministry. But the most important lesson I learned was this: the Lord does not need **me** or my plans for his church to grow. The Lord will use his Word and his Spirit to accomplish all of his purposes and nothing can stand in his way, especially not COVID or any other health and safety concern.

If you've been worshipping with us in person over the last few months you will have noticed the number of new faces keeps on increasing. What a blessing this has been! This blessing has resulted in a wonderful "problem": we are having trouble fitting everyone in the church. Thankfully we have an overflow seating area in the fellowship hall, but ideally we want to have everyone in the sanctuary together. **To that end, your session, in consultation with the diaconate, have decided to increase our seating capacity in the sanctuary.** Our goal is to eventually return to the full use of our sanctuary but we think it best to take a tiered approach. Here is the main thing that you need to know: the first six pews (counting from the pulpit) on each side of the church will be made fully available for use during worship services. This change will take our capacity on the main floor from 14 available pews to 20 available pews and should allow us to fit everyone in the sanctuary. We will still have over half the sanctuary with alternating pews dedicated to social distancing. This means there will be four pews on each side of the church that offer social distancing between pews as well

as the final pew on each side that will be reserved as a mask required or a social distanced required pew (you can still make a reservation for these pews if you'd like). The balcony seating will remain the same for the time being (mask required area). The socially distanced overflow seating in the fellowship hall will continue to be available as well. These changes will take effect on **Sunday, April 4th**.

There is one more change that will take place on **Sunday, April 4th**. After a one-year break, in-person Sunday School will resume. Our adult Sunday School classes will take on a hybrid format in that we will offer both in-person and Zoom options for both classes. In addition, there will be (for the first time in a year) dedicated Sunday School classes for our children and youth. One of the ministries most directly affected by not meeting in-person for Sunday School has been our children and youth ministries. Our assistant director of student and family ministries, Melissa Giddens, has done an excellent job trying to minister to our children and youth by faithfully teaching a Sunday afternoon Bible class via Zoom to all of our kids. She has had the difficult task of trying to conduct a class for children ranging in age from five to thirteen. That has not been easy, and yet she has done it remarkably well. It is time we minister to our children and youth in a manner that best fits their particular learning levels. In addition, we have many new families with young children who are eager to get involved in Sunday School and this is a great way to help these new families connect to our church. Knox has written a separate letter outlining the details and procedures for in-person Sunday School. **One point of clarification: For the time being we will maintain every other row for the SS class in the sanctuary (which is different from what I outlined regarding worship services). I know this may be confusing, but the primary reason for the change to the worship service seating is to open up more space and fit everyone in the sanctuary. However, space should not be an issue in the Sunday School classes and so we'll maintain the "every other row" setup for Sunday School.**

Let me say two things very clearly. **First**, we are offering both in-person and Zoom options for **both** adult Sunday School classes. If you prefer to participate from home for Sunday School then that option is still available to you. **Second**, just because we are offering the option for in-person Sunday School **does not mean** that the session expects you to be here in-person for Sunday School. You will not be pressured into coming in-person. We do hope that everyone will be able to join us in-person for both Sunday School and public worship as soon as possible, but we understand that everyone's situation is different.

Friends, the Lord has blessed us tremendously during what has been a difficult and challenging year. As we take one more step towards something resembling "normalcy" we continue to ask for your patience and understanding. Please continue to pray that we will show a spirit of charity to one another and that we will maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). I look forward to seeing you soon.

Your pastor and friend,

Chad Watkins