



To Know Jesus and Make Him Known

Worship!

Wait for the Lord.

Be strong and don't lose hope.

Wait for the Lord.

(Psalm 27:14, NIRV)

The staff and I are grateful for your patience and support as we move back to worshipping together in person. Our decisions about how to do this safely have been made after many hours of conversation, lots of research, and some trial and error. We couldn't have done this without your prayers and encouragement.

Getting Back Together

This coming Sunday, June 21, we will pilot test in-person worship with about 20 people. Our total capacity in the sanctuary is 193, so we will be at around 10% capacity on Sunday.

When we live-stream our services, there are nine of us in the sanctuary: 6 staff, and 3 technicians -- which means that the people needed to conduct and film the service occupy 5% of our capacity. As you can see from the pictures, we practice social distancing with each other, so we're really spread out.





With the 9 people needed to sing, pray, preach, and live-stream the service, we will add another 10-11 folks this week to get to 10%. We're starting with our own families (people with whom we've been quarantined) to limit our exposure to the virus. This service on June 21 will be the "dress rehearsal" the Annual Conference has asked us to do.



The following week we'll have a different group of folks join us. We'll send a separate email this week letting you know how to sign up for that worship service. We'll continue to do this into July, weekly rotating who is will be attending . Once we're confident we can safely manage 10% occupancy, we will begin increasing to 25%.

After we're successfully managing 25% occupancy, we'll begin working toward having two services again. This will be a bit tricky, because everything will have to be sanitized between the services. (We've been unable to find any disinfectant spray, so we'd appreciate any you could give us.)

Once we have both services running at 25% capacity, we'll evaluate increasing the size of the congregation based on South Carolina's COVID statistics.

We will be following CDC's Guidelines and the SC Annual Conference's Best Practices for in-person worship services. This will include:

- If you are in a **high risk category** for COVID, we encourage you to stay home and enjoy the service on Facebook live or the church's website. While we are taking as many precautions as we can, we can't completely eliminate the risk of catching the virus.
- **Masks/face coverings** are required. We will have some available if you need one.
- **Temperatures will be checked** at the door. If your temperature is 100.4 or higher, we'll have you sit for a few minutes then recheck. If your temperature continues to be elevated, we'll ask you to return home and sign up for a different service.
- **Social distancing** is mandatory. While you may be comfortable with close contact, others may not be. We don't want to put those people in a position to remind you to back up. So, no hugs or handshakes, please.
- We will set up socially distanced **designated seating** for you or your family. When you arrive, someone will escort you to your designated seating area.
- **Bathrooms will be off limits**, unless there is a true emergency. Please plan ahead.
- We will **not be serving Holy Communion**. Here is the guidance we've received from the Annual Conference: "'Virtual' communion – with the pastor blessing in the sanctuary, and congregation consuming elements at home isn't in keeping with our theology and practice. The medical doctor who is on the Cabinet Task Force advises *against consuming communion in the sanctuary*, because it involves taking off masks."
- We will **not be singing as a congregation**. We've done a lot of research on this, and have learned that wearing a mask doesn't prevent fine aerosol from escaping when someone is singing. You can read more here: [When Will It Be Safe To Sing Together Again?](#)
- We encourage you to **bring a jacket or sweater** because the sanctuary will be cold when you arrive. We will shut off the air conditioner during the service to minimize the movement of aerosol when our professional staff sing.
- We ask that you **arrive between 9:30 and 9:40**. Please wait at the entrance door until we can take your temperature and guide you to your seat. (We ask that you practice social distancing while in line.) Because we will be doing sound checks and practicing for the service, please do not arrive early.
- Also, everyone will need to be **in their seats by 9:45**, and **stay seated** until the service is over. Remember that we will be live-streaming the service, and that most members will be watching from home -- these seating guidelines will keep everyone out of the way of the camera, minimize noise, and to allow the staff to move freely to get to their positions. We go live at 9:50.

- We are **unable to provide a nursery or children's church** due to social distancing concerns. Children who are able to remain seated and quiet while we live-stream are, of course, invited to join us for worship! Children who are 2 years or younger do not have to wear masks.
- Please **notify the church immediately** if you, or anyone in your family, tests positive for COVID within two weeks of attending a service. We'll keep ongoing records of attendance so that we can do contact tracing with others who attended the same service.

I realize these guidelines will be asking some of us to take more measures against spreading the virus than we are doing at home. When I find myself getting frustrated with some of the limits COVID is placing on my life, I find it helpful to remember Paul's words to the Philippians:

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:3-5)

To have the mind of Christ means being willing to give up our comfort and preferences for the sake of those around us.

Each of our guidelines is in place to help us avoid unintentionally infecting anyone else. As a community of Jesus' followers, we're asking that we all give up some of our freedom to keep those around us healthy.

What Else Can We Expect?

The sanctuary looks very different than when we last worshiped together in person. You can get an idea of how everything is spread out by looking at the attached pictures. Since we'll be making some more changes before Sunday, we will send you a video after the service showing you what to expect when you arrive. Hopefully this will keep anyone from being surprised by the set up.

Unfortunately, this will not feel like church as usual. Because of the number of infections in SC, it may be a long wait before things more closely resemble the services you love so much.

What Will Be Happening Down The Road?

We will begin working on some fun activities after we've gotten the hang of in-person worship services. Possibilities include outdoor sing-a-longs and, maybe even a socially distanced outdoor service of Holy Communion. If you have some ideas about activities you'd like us to try, please let us know.

What About Youth Ministries?

Also, Bonnie will be in touch shortly about guidelines for **in-person youth gatherings**. We wanted to get our worship information released before discussing other types of gatherings. Parents, please keep an eye on your inbox for Bonnie's information.

Taking Care of One Another

I wish it were safe for us to be together again in one place. Since it's not safe, I appreciate your willingness to continue working with us. *We're trying to build the road as we walk on it, and your prayers keep us going.*

I hope you'll join me in thanking our staff and worship volunteers for all of the extra work they're taking on to keep us connected. All of us are juggling multiple priorities to keep ourselves and our families healthy. By honoring the worship guidelines we've put in place, you're not only taking care of fellow church members, but also allowing us to do our jobs as safely as possible.

I am personally grateful to you for understanding our precautions. My mother is scheduled for back surgery in July, and I need to be virus-free to be there with her. I know each of the other staff members and the people on our technical team have similar plans and obligations, so thank you for taking care of them, too.

Stay tuned for our "behind the scenes" video early next week! In the meantime, please care for yourselves and one another.

Blessings,
Pastor Robin



