

Resuming In-Person Worship at Fairfield Presbyterian Church

Yesterday, May 14, the Session approved the resumption of in-person services starting with Sunday, June 7. There are particular conditions for those attending and there will be changes in the manner in which we conduct worship. **Please read the whole document.**

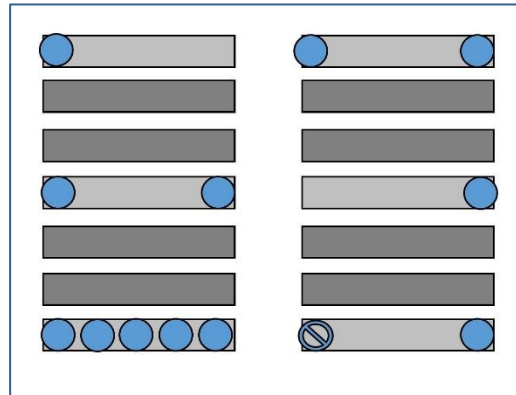
COVID-19 is here to stay; it will not be possible to presume normalcy until/unless a vaccine is developed which is (nearly) universally administered. Between development, mass production, and mass distribution, that will easily be a year or more away. The safe practices that we have been learning to adopt lately in our daily lives **must** be continued until that time. **These are not options** if we are to offer our faithful witness to the health and safety of all.

COVID-19 is highly communicable. Its primary modes of transmission are in the air and from contact with solid surfaces. It can hang in the air for *hours*, available to be breathed in by someone unprotected. It can survive on hard surfaces for *several days* and on porous surfaces for *many hours*. Avoiding unprotected breathing, particularly in closed spaces, and avoiding contact with surfaces must be priorities.

COVID-19 is remarkably insidious and difficult to detect. There is an astonishing percentage of people who have contracted COVID-19 and show **no** symptoms - they are asymptomatic. Although they show no symptoms, they can communicate the virus to others. This means that a person who is virus-free one Sunday could be carrying the virus the next Sunday and not even know it, exposing everyone in the closed area of the sanctuary. The procedure of temperature testing simply screens for the most obvious person who *does* have symptoms (we will not do this); it *cannot* detect the asymptomatic person. Even testing is merely a snapshot; a person could be tested one day, contract the virus the next day, and get a negative test result the next day, believing they are virus-free when they are not. In short, vigilance is critical and nothing should be assumed. I could be a carrier. You could, too. And we may have no idea that we are carriers. (If you doubt this, please email me and I will link you to a bunch of articles documenting this.)

Our congregation is in the unique position of having a tiny number of worship attendees (around 15 typically) and a sanctuary that seats over 80. It is possible for us to practice 6 foot social distancing in our sanctuary space. However, remember that our air conditioning and heating ventilation system is nothing remarkable; the air is relatively trapped for the time when we are present in the sanctuary.

The seating model will use every third row of pews with 'household seats' along either wall plus the center aisle - three positions. We should be able to seat two dozen or so, depending on household size. Obviously, if 5 people in one household should sit in one pew, that removes the center aisle availability for that pew, allowing seating only along the other wall. Here is a graphic as an example >



Masks are required. Unlined cloth masks provide *little* protection, but a lining or a blocking material - napkin, paper towel, or the like - between the mask and face is superior.

Ideally, you should not be able to move the flame of a lit match by blowing through your mask. Otherwise, you are creating aerosols that can spread the virus, and you are susceptible to

receiving the virus as well. **Masks are mandatory.** We trust that you will ensure that your mask is effective, not a flimsy, ineffective covering that could expose yourself and the rest of us to the virus. Masks are not comfortable, but **if you do not wear one, you cannot worship with us in-person.** You are welcome to listen to the service over the speakers outside in your car or view the sermon video online on Monday if this mask requirement is a problem. Our health as a community of faith depends on your cooperation.

I will be wearing a mask from the moment I leave my car until I enter it again after the service. You must do the same. Yes, I will conduct the service and preach with a mask on.

Minimal contacts with surfaces will be another strategy. This means no bulletins, no inserts, no hymnals, and no pew bibles. I will figure out how to arrange a screen and projector to provide viewing of the order of worship and its components, the music, and the scripture texts. You can always bring your own bible.

The *Fairfielder* will be available for viewing and/or download and printing by you so that you can bring your own copy with you - a link will be blast emailed late on Saturday. We will stick with familiar hymns. Those who are musically inclined and require musical notation will also have a link in that blast email to scans of the music for viewing and/or download and printing by you so that you can bring your own copy with you. Most folks probably don't require this if the tune is familiar.

The collection will feature one usher (having two was pretty unnecessary, right?). If you raise your hand, the usher will come to you. You are strongly encouraged to use the

'bill pay' system provided by your bank so that your bank sends a check directly to the church's P.O. Box. (The only thing I use checks for is the church and the dog groomer; I have been paying dozens of items each month electronically for years without issue.)

The expectation of “putting something in the collection plate” is now finished, over, done with, kaput. (Hallelujah!) The **best** expectation is that your donation is sent directly by your bank (you save the postage stamp!) to the church. If you cannot access that service which your bank provides, then place your check or cash in the plate *before* the worship service, using the usher *only* if you forgot. In other words, it is best if the usher is making no contact either with you or with your handheld donation.

Hymn singing is discouraged in most guidelines for re-opening. However we trust that you will wear an effective protective mask that passes the 'match test' as described earlier and we will have hymn singing. You should be aware that an *effective* mask may restrict breathing patterns and folks should not be surprised if they need to stop singing to catch their breath, or will find it difficult to sing with a mask at all. Sorry, safety comes first.

Our next occasion for communion will not occur until Worldwide Communion Sunday, the first Sunday in October. **Pentecost is Sunday, May 31** and we will have a remembrance of the Lord's Supper in the service video online as we did at Easter. The Session has not decided how we will conduct communion in our new situation, so stay tuned - surely, it will be different. (Or how to blow out candles on Christmas Eve ... hmmm.)

The words “church” and “change” are not welcome in the same sentence. Our church will need to experience a whole lot of change in order to resume worship safely. Your patience and cooperation as we negotiate the new terms of our faithful worship will be appreciated. Indeed, we are all in this together. Let's be faithful *and* be safe.

Bruce