



# Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian

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The Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Clark, Pastor

May 26, 2020

Dear Members and Friends,

Following our live-streaming of the worship service Mother's Day, May 10, I was touched and inspired when I saw this Facebook post of a former dear colleague from the Presbyterian Church of New Providence, NJ (where I served 1989-91) who is now serving in Texas. She had a little trouble spelling "inexhaustible," but I certainly resonated with Barbara's expressed longing and expectation for our **re-gathering**, a deep longing shared by the Psalmist of long ago (Psalm 122:1), "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"

As mentioned in the congregational email that went out this past Saturday, the Session prayerfully voted during its May 21 Stated Meeting to resume in-person worship services at Greenwood Community Church commencing **May 31, Pentecost Sunday**. At a press conference the following day, the President gave the green light for opening all houses of worship May 24, for which I was grateful, but we abided by our original intention and waited for May 31, as much needed to be planned for and prepared.

An excerpt from correspondence of my daughter's church (Kirkmont Presbyterian of Beavercreek, OH) summarizes our intentions well: "We are not encouraging you to come back or discouraging you from doing so, we have simply decided to open our doors and welcome those of you who would choose to worship in person at this time. We recognize the risks associated with gathering together for worship and have decided to allow the members of our congregation to choose whether they want to take those risks or not." We plan to continue to live stream the worship services indefinitely, and fully understand and support those of you who would choose to continue to worship that way, whether it be out of health concerns or principle. Also, we are working to provide in-house live streaming of worship in Fellowship Hall, the 29Eleven room and perhaps the church parlor to allow for overflow seating and/or needed quarantine space (as per CDC guidelines to "offer options for congregants at higher risk for severe illness that limit their exposure risk, e.g., remote participation in worship." See enclosed copy of the most recent CDC/Federal guidelines for Communities of Faith, which is in harmony with guidance supplied by our insurance provider).

On May 21 Session also reviewed the (well-written!) Statements of Faith from the 2019-2020 Confirmation Class, and voted to receive eight students into full membership of the church, "if the way be clear." The last five words were added because one Statement of Faith is still pending (partly due to electronic miscommunication/difficulties), and one student has yet to receive the Sacrament of Baptism (a request also approved by Session ... on a semi-related note, clerk Elaine Magyar just reminded me that May 24/Youth Sunday speaker/soloist Rachel Porcaro was baptized and confirmed at Greenwood five years earlier that very day ... May 24, 2015!). This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday, which has historically/liturgically long been a day to celebrate confirmations and baptisms; we will be formally recognizing our new members from the 2019-2020 Confirmation Class who choose to be present. A recognition will be scheduled for a later date for any others.

**WE NEED YOU TO SIGN UP IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION;** see instructions on the back of this page. Because of our social distancing measures, we will have limited seating available (approximately seventy in our sanctuary) and therefore are requesting you to please sign up in advance if you plan to attend. First priority seating will be given to immediate family of Confirmation students. To further promote social distancing practices, we are working to include a video feed option in Fellowship Hall, the 29Eleven room and possibly in the parlor.

There is so much that could be said; this is one of the more difficult letters I've had to (concisely) compose in all my 35+ years of ministry. We are in uncharted waters; never in the history of our nation has there been such a time as this! We are prayerfully trying to figure this out as best we can as we proceed to "... go [back] to the house of the Lord!"

*"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."*

1 Peter 3:8



Blessings and best regards,

Stephen L. Clark

## ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS AND MISCELLANEOUS DETAILS

- We recognize the sensitive issue that some won't attend a service without masks being required, while others won't attend a service if masks are required ... as per the enclosed CDC guidelines, facemask use is strongly encouraged, but not mandated. As Father Robert Marciano of St. Kevin's shared on WPRI's Eyewitness News last week, *"If someone comes in without a mask on, I'm not going to confront them. There could be health reasons, and I think it crosses the HIPAA boundaries as far as a person's confidentiality for medical reasons. So ... no one is going to say 'Get a mask on or get out' ... that's not going to happen."* But we **do** require all to do their best to maintain the recommended social distancing of six feet between non-family persons at all times.
- One of the overflow sites (*either Fellowship Hall or the 29Eleven room*) will be designated a "Masks Required" room.
- Roughly every other pew will be open in the sanctuary and pews will be marked off to leave a distance on either side of people from different households; ushers will be prepared to guide you in seating.
- Rows of chairs will be six feet apart in other rooms accommodating live streaming, and we will be leaving at least three chairs empty between households.
- The hymnals and pew Bibles are not to be used for right now; all worship materials will be reproduced in the bulletins which you may pick up as you enter the worship service. Also, the worship materials will be made available online for those who may prefer to use personal electronic devices.
- We'll be taking this one week at a time, but for now there will be no nursery care, Children's Church, or Sunday School for any age until further notice.
- There will be no Passing of the Peace during the service
- The offering plates will not be passed, but strategically placed in the narthex and by the entrance doors for people to place tithes and offerings. Online giving is also encouraged.
- The Lord's Supper will be celebrated utilizing individual (sanitized) communion packets, which will be available for you to pick up as you enter the worship service (*provided the order for these from Cokesbury Church Products comes through in time!*)
- There will be no formal coffee hour/refreshment time.
- **TO HELP US WITH PLANNING, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU PLAN TO COME TO WORSHIP.** The most efficient way for us to handle this is for you to go to our website, [www.gccp.org](http://www.gccp.org), and click on the heading subcategory on the home page "**RSVP for Worship.**" Or, you can go directly to [www.gccp.org/RSVP](http://www.gccp.org/RSVP) . A form will pop up for you to fill out and submit. If you have difficulty navigating technology, just give the church a telephone call to let us know you're coming; if you get the answering machine let us know your name, number attending, and a number we can call to confirm if necessary.
- **PLEASE DO YOUR BEST TO BE ACCURATE;** i.e., only make "reservations" if you are committed to being present, and please call/email to cancel if plans change. Also, please be sensitive to the need for us to reserve primary sanctuary space for the families of Confirmation students. Again, this is uncharted territory for us; I trust all to be graciously understanding as we do our best to accommodate everyone, given our limitations.

**THANK YOU!**



# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

## Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith

CDC offers the following general considerations to help communities of faith discern how best to practice their beliefs while keeping their staff and congregations safe. Millions of Americans embrace worship as an essential part of life. For many faith traditions, gathering together for worship is at the heart of what it means to be a community of faith. But as Americans are now aware, gatherings present a risk for increasing spread of COVID-19 during this Public Health Emergency. CDC offers these suggestions for faith communities to consider and accept, reject, or modify, consistent with their own faith traditions, in the course of preparing to reconvene for in-person gatherings while still working to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution or any other federal law, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). The federal government may not prescribe standards for interactions of faith communities in houses of worship, and in accordance with the First Amendment, no faith community should be asked to adopt any mitigation strategies that are more stringent than the mitigation strategies asked of similarly situated entities or activities.

In addition, we note that while many types of gatherings are important for civic and economic well-being, religious worship has particularly profound significance to communities and individuals, including as a right protected by the First Amendment. State and local authorities are reminded to take this vital right into account when establishing their own re-opening plans.

## Scaling Up Operations

- Establish and maintain communication with local and State authorities to determine current mitigation levels in your community.
- Provide protections for staff and congregants at [higher risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19. Offer options for staff at [higher risk for severe illness](#) (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk. Offer options for congregants at [higher risk of severe illness](#) that limit their exposure risk (e.g., remote participation in services).
- Consistent with applicable federal and State laws and regulations, put in place policies that protect the privacy and confidentiality of people at [higher risk for severe illness](#) regarding underlying medical conditions.
- Encourage any organizations that share or use the facilities to also follow these considerations as applicable.
- If your community provides social services in the facility as part of its mission, consult CDC's information for [schools](#) and [businesses and workplaces](#), as relevant, for helpful information.

## Safety Actions

### Promote [healthy hygiene practices](#)

- Encourage staff and congregants to maintain good hand hygiene, [washing hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for those who can safely use hand sanitizer), tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
- Encourage staff and congregants to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed.
- Whenever soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used.
- Consider posting signs on how to [stop the spread](#)  of COVID-19 and how to [promote everyday protective measures](#)  , such as [washing hands](#), covering coughs and sneezes, and [properly wearing a face covering](#)  .

## Cloth face coverings

- Encourage use of [cloth face coverings](#) among staff and congregants. Face coverings are most essential when [social distancing](#) is difficult. Note: [Cloth face coverings](#) should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance. [Cloth face coverings](#) are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.

## Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation

- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects in between uses.
- Develop a schedule of increased, routine cleaning and disinfection.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure [safe and correct application](#) of disinfectants and keep them away from children.
- Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.
- Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- If your faith community offers multiple services, consider scheduling services far enough apart to allow time for cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces between services. [Take steps](#) to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of [Legionnaires' disease](#) and other diseases associated with water.

## Promote social distancing

- Take steps to limit the size of gatherings in accordance with the guidance and directives of state and local authorities and subject to the protections of the First Amendment and any other applicable federal law.
- Promote [social distancing](#) at services and other gatherings, ensuring that clergy, staff, choir, volunteers and attendees at the services follow social distancing, as circumstances and faith traditions allow, to lessen their risk.
- Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances and faith traditions allow.
- Consider appropriate mitigation measures, including taking steps to limit the size of gatherings maintaining [social distancing](#), at other gatherings such as funerals, weddings, religious education classes, youth events, support groups and any other programming, where consistent with the faith tradition.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or walkways and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating "one-way routes" in hallways).

## Take steps to minimize community sharing of worship materials and other items

- Consistent with the community's faith tradition, consider temporarily limiting the sharing of frequently touched objects, such as worship aids, prayer rugs, prayer books, hymnals, religious texts and other bulletins, books, or other items passed or shared among congregants, and encouraging congregants to bring their own such items, if possible, or photocopying or projecting prayers, songs, and texts using electronic means.
- Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions. Consider a stationary collection box, the main, or electronic methods of collection regular financial contributions instead of shared collection trays or baskets.
- Consider whether physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, or kissing) can be limited among members of the faith community.
- If food is offered at any event, consider pre-packaged options, and avoid buffet or family-style meals if possible.

## Nursery/Childcare

- If a nursery or childcare will be provided during services and events, refer to CDC's information on [preventing the spread of COVID-19 in childcare settings](#) and adapt as needed for your setting.
- If holding summer day camps, refer to CDC's information on [youth and summer camps](#) and adapt as needed.

## Staffing and Training

- Train all clergy and staff in the above safety actions. Consider conducting the training virtually, or, if in-person, ensure that [social distancing](#) is maintained.

## Monitoring and Preparing

### Check for signs and symptoms

- Encourage staff or congregants who are sick or who have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 to stay home. Share CDC's criteria for staying home with staff and congregants so that they know how to care for themselves and others. Consider posting signs at entrances with this information.

### Plan for when a staff member or congregant becomes sick

- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 during hours of operation, and ensure that children are not left without adult supervision.
- Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes [sick](#) at the facility to their home or a healthcare facility.
- Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)  or other applicable laws and in accordance with religious practices.
- Advise those with [exposure](#) to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to [stay home and self-monitor](#) for symptoms, and follow [CDC guidance](#) if symptoms develop.
- Close off areas used by the [sick](#) person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection. Ensure [safe and correct application](#) of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- Advise staff and congregants with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's [criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).

### Maintain healthy operations

- Implement flexible sick leave and related flexible policies and practices for staff (e.g., allow work from home, if feasible), and provide requested reasonable accommodation absent undue hardship to individuals with disabilities under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)  or other applicable laws and in accordance with religious practices.
- Monitor absenteeism and create a roster of trained back-up staff.
- Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Staff, clergy, volunteers, and congregants should know who this person is and how to contact them if they become sick or are around others diagnosed with COVID-19. This person should also be aware of state or local regulatory agency policies related to group gatherings.
- As volunteers often perform important duties (e.g., greeters, ushers, childcare), consider similar monitoring, planning, and training for them. Consider that volunteer and staffing may need to increase to implement cleaning and safety protocols and to accommodate additional services with reduced attendance.
- Communicate clearly with staff and congregants about actions being taken to protect their health.

### Signs and Messages

- Post [signs](#) in highly visible locations (e.g., entrances, restrooms, gathering halls/community rooms/gyms) that [promote everyday protective measures](#)  and describe how to [stop the spread](#)  of germs (such as by [properly washing](#)

hands and properly wearing a cloth face covering  ).

- Include messages (for example, [videos](#)) about behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with staff and congregants (such as in emails and on community websites and [social media accounts](#)).
- Find freely available CDC print and digital resources on CDC's [communications resources](#) main page.

## Closing

- Check [state](#) and [local](#)  health department notices daily about transmission in the community and adjust operations.
- In the event a person diagnosed with COVID-19 is determined to have been in the building and poses a risk to the community, it is strongly suggested to dismiss attendees, then properly clean and disinfect the area and the building where the individual was present before resuming activities.

Page last reviewed: May 23, 2020