

September 10, 2020

To Members and Friends of Grace Church:

The world changed in March and it hasn't stopped changing. When I look around in the church sanctuary it looks like time simply stopped. Finally I closed the book for announcements which was still on March 8th. I changed the banner in the sanctuary to one more fitting for Spring/Summer and changed again for Fall. I changed the banner in the hallway from the "Walk in Faith" one that had footsteps through snow! The silence in the sanctuary was, as they say, deafening! A presence is missing in the sanctuary. It is all of you! I have been meeting with a subgroup of the Consistory to prepare for reopening the sanctuary for worship, and to talk about what that worship might look like. That subgroup and the entire Consistory has faithfully deliberated the issue of reopening the sanctuary for worship and the church building for activities at every monthly meeting. Recently the Consistory has arrived at a decision to reopen. What follows are the results of that decision. No doubt some will be disappointed with what evolves and what has changed. No, things can't be just the way it was before mid-March. It may never quite be that way again at least for some time. Only God knows that. But we pray this worship experience is helpful, hopeful, and inspiring. Here is what you can expect when you come to worship at Grace Church:

- **There will be two options for worship.** Since the parking lot service seems popular and is, arguably, the safest service we can offer outside of an online service, that will continue in the same format at 88.3 FM. It will be a simultaneous broadcast of the service in the sanctuary. It will begin at **10:00 a.m.** Participants of either service will be expected to fully comply with the guidelines listed below. Following the guidelines is the best we can do to keep everyone safe. **Please be aware these guidelines offer no guarantee of safety.** Other necessary safety precautions are below. The service will be about 35-40 minutes to lessen the time together indoors.
- **If you are in the church building, you will be expected to wear a mask covering both your nose and mouth.** Please do not ask us for an exception to this rule. (I know. "But I don't have the virus!" I know that! The virus told me that after it jumped to your nasal cavity when you saw your cousin three days ago when your mask was below your nose!) This is not only about you. **It is about everyone else.** If you do not have a mask, you may get one as you arrive. Let an usher know and you will be provided with a one-time use mask, or join us next week in the parking lot. Only some of the worship leaders may not wear masks at the time they are speaking (so you can understand us), or soloists, if they are singing. There is increased distance between the worship leaders and the congregation for increased safety for both. I have decided, even if you can't hear me as clearly as you did before, I will still wear a mask the entire time during the worship service.
- **You will be expected to socially distance at all times, whether in the parking lot or in the sanctuary.** As you come in, please don't "bottle-neck" but go right into the sanctuary, and proceed to the seats farthest from the door that are available. I know. It likely will not be where you usually sit! It will be OK. Some pews will be taped off.

Please do not sit there. Families may sit together, of course. If there is 6 feet or so of space between you, someone may join you in the pew. A center line of tape reminds you to distance in the middle. There are folding seats in the very back of the sanctuary as well.

Some other changes include:

There will be no congregational singing. Of course, unfortunately, there can't be a choir either! Many of us enjoy simply listening to the music and hymns. This is your service. If singing is your thing, the Parking Lot service would be better for you. There will be some congregational speaking parts in both services, such as the Lord's Prayer. Soloists or small family groups may sing in the chancel area during worship. If you or your family would like to sing sometime in the sanctuary worship, please let me know.

The ushers will dismiss you by rows so that there is not a bottle-neck of people leaving at the same time. All doors out of the sanctuary will be available for your egress.

If you use the restroom, please one at a time, then disinfect the touched surfaces when you leave with the wipes provided. Of course, parents should accompany children.

Afterwards, I will be out in the back parking lot by the back door of the fellowship hall, socially distanced and wearing a mask, if you need to quickly tell me something.

The offering is an important time in the service for some people. In the sanctuary, you may make an offering by leaving it in a plate by the door as you depart. We will not pass it. At the conclusion of the service, an usher will go to the exit drive nearest the church, with the pole-and-net as we have done before. If you have an offering, the usher will receive your offering. Prayer requests can still be emailed to me (joyfamily5@comcast.net), or phoned in to me (330-277-6640), by Saturday night, or early Sunday. You can also text. There won't be a way to write them down and hand them to me, for obvious reasons. If I ever forget anyone, please forgive me and simply email, snail mail, or text me.

In the sanctuary the service will be projected as much as possible. There will be limited copies of the service and sermon available for those who cannot print it out at home, or who have no computer, or have impaired eyesight, or are visitors. **Printing them out at home is the best way to assure no virus will be transferred to you.** Please don't be tempted to think "I'll just save on printer ink and use one at the church."

There will not be a children's sermon, nursery, greeting time, choir, or coffee hour. These are things many of us enjoy. No fear! We will eventually get back to these too! Later on, Sunday School and Bible study groups can meet if it can be done in a safe manner. That will first be up to Consistory and then the group itself.

I know this seems like a lot of hassle, but it is either this or continue only with the parking lot, which I, personally, am comfortable doing for the duration of however long this lasts. I will do about anything it takes to keep us worshipping in some way, or in as many ways as possible! The printed service will be available on the church website and through the weekly Grace Newsflashes.

In ages gone by, the Church has had to adapt and worship during times of persecution. Worship in the catacombs in Rome happened to escape arrest and torture by the authorities. The Pilgrims in England had to worship in their homes, changing when and where they met to avoid being arrested and their property seized. Are we under persecution? Yes, in a fashion. We are being persecuted by a virus! But this virus is "small potatoes" compared to what the early Christians endured. But if we do not adapt in the right way, this potentially deadly virus could very likely make some ill in our active congregation. We don't want to see that. So, for a time,

we adapt and do what we need to do. I do believe worship will become more “normal” in the future. Eventually congregational singing will resume. Someday, we’ll be able to shake hands and hug and talk without masks. But that time is not now, not yet. Life and health are in the balance. The good thing is, we can adapt, mitigate the risk, and worship in or out. So: choose wisely, worship regularly, pray without ceasing.

We will begin this format of worship, the sanctuary worship being simultaneously broadcast to the parking lot, at 10:00 a.m., on Sunday, September 20. I hope to see you there, inside or outside! Please call me if you have questions or concerns. (330-277-6640) On behalf of your Consistory:

Grace and Peace, Pastor Rob