

Special Edition

Pause with Pastor

June 2, 2021

We're Fully Open – With Common Courtesies

Holy Lamb's Elders, followed by the Leadership Team (Elders and Council) spent 2 hours analyzing, discussing, and debating the many concerns and opportunities associated with the further reopening of our facilities. After the meetings concluded, I shared with a couple participants that I believe our conversations and process were more thoughtful and in-depth than ANY government agency had ever engaged in while making their decisions about Covid. I did not mean that in jest; we were diligent and caring. I thank each of you who shared your thoughts with our leaders.

To summarize: we are opening our worship services without any mandatory limits or restrictions. However, in this time of Covid awareness, every person has his/her own unique comfort level. We ask that each of us recognize this and *extend common courtesies* to each other, even if we don't share the same concerns. This perspective can be seen throughout the many contingencies we are putting in place, as follows:

Outdoor options

I'll start with the easy one: all outdoor options (on the lawn, in the cars) will remain unchanged. The good news is: if the weather turns sour at the last minute and you would like to come inside, you are welcome to do so.

Pre-registration, Attendance Recording, and Contact Tracing

Pre-registration will no longer be required; the page on our website will be taken down. We will still record those in attendance for potential Contact Tracing. This is prudent because, while our community numbers are way down, we have just finished the Memorial Day weekend, summer is beginning, and the July 4th holiday is just around the corner. Our county numbers could spike if vacationers bring the virus with them. Should that happen, and someone attending our service notifies us that they have tested positive, we will be able to notify everyone in attendance that they have potentially been exposed.

This means that the person recording attendance may ask your name. We have many new families and faces and we do not all know each other. Please don't be offended by the question, but take the opportunity to greet the individual *after* worship, *outside*, and get to know each other.

Sanctuary Seating

Our chairs will be returned to the Sanctuary in their normal configuration. We are, however, leaving some out in order to provide wider aisles. None of the seats will be restricted – you are free to sit wherever and with whomever you choose.

At the same time, recognizing the individual preferences of others, as well as what has become a spontaneous concern for minimal separation, before you take a seat right next to someone else, please ask if they mind being that close. We have all experienced doctors' offices which still have mandatory spacing in their waiting areas. Consider this an example.

Masks

Masks are optional. (See the paragraph “Vaccinations” below for additional comments.)

Communion Distribution

Communicants in the Sanctuary are invited to come to the rail to receive the body and blood of Jesus – kneeling is optional. Again, rather than crowding our rail in order make as few tables as possible, please relax your spacing, demonstrating the common courtesies that will be the hallmark of our reopening.

The Common Cup will be offered at the rail for those who choose to receive the wine in this manner. We will implement a procedure that had been planned before we closed, but never enacted since we eliminated the common cup. That is, the Purificator (the napkin I use to wipe the rim of the cup after every person, and again, entirely, between tables) will be saturated with alcohol by the Altar Guild prior to the service. This practice has been in place at many congregations for years.

Communicants in the Sanctuary who may be uncomfortable gathering at the rail will be served at their seat as we have done, in the past, for those whose mobility issues prevented them from coming to the rail. As in those previous cases and given that the Sanctuary will be full of chairs, if you desire to be communed at your seat, please sit next to an aisle for accessibility.

Outdoor distribution will remain as it is now.

The Elders and I will wear masks while distributing the elements as a courtesy to those who have concerns about the closeness of the face-to-face encounter. Since the medical experts have concluded that surface contact is not a significant risk, we will wash our hands and use hand sanitizer, but no gloves.

Miscellaneous during worship

The offering will be received at the door, as it is now. Sharing the peace will be no-touch. Turn to your neighbor or look across the room and nod while saying or mouthing, “Peace be with you.” Hymnals will not be placed in the Sanctuary because we will still need to print full bulletins for outdoor worshippers, and we are not going to print 2 versions of the bulletin.

Fellowship

With the exception of June 20th, we will not serve beverages and pastries after the 9:30 service. (See the paragraph *Beginning June 13th* (below) for an explanation of the time change.) This has been our ‘summer’ practice for many years and will continue this year.

Given our small Narthex, we still encourage all conversation to occur outside the building. Again, think of the common courtesy extended to those who are not involved in your conversation, but due to our limited space, would be in close proximity to you. This is especially true in the Sanctuary since we will have more chairs and people gathered there. This will also keep the noise level low in the Sanctuary – something that has always been a challenge.

Restrooms

Restrictions are removed. Once again, please act with common courtesy concerning the number of people in the restroom at one time.

Vaccinations

One final thought: While the overwhelming majority of us have been vaccinated, several have not. The reasons vary from health vulnerabilities to personal objections. Also, according to health experts, someone with immune deficiencies, even if vaccinated, is still at some risk of contracting the virus. For these reasons, I encourage those who have immune deficiencies or are not vaccinated to wear a mask. This protects you as well as others, especially during the next 2 months when our community is more vulnerable to outside infection.

Then, Beginning June 13th

On June 13th our worship times will change to 8:00 and 9:30. This accomplishes several items:

1. Historically, our summer schedule changed to accommodate no Sunday Bible class. We are continuing that practice.
2. Outdoor worshipers will have cooler temperatures as we move into the summer months. You may recall that our original outdoor time was 9:00. We moved to 10:30 when the temps dropped.
3. Many prefer the extra time on these summer Sundays to engage in other activities, including getting to lunch ahead of the rush of tourists.

We are delaying this change one week in order to allow a greater opportunity for all to be fully informed.

In Conclusion

These practices are meant to meet the minimal *needs* of everyone and, hopefully, the *preferences* of most. I doubt if any practice would fully satisfy everybody's every preference. But this is the nature of working together as a family. That is, we don't negotiate for the most we can get. Rather, we seek a solution that meets essential needs; and then address other issues as we are able.

I pray that our worship will continue to bless you, increase your faith, and strengthen our mutual bonds as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In His service,
Pastor Panning