

Resuming Care-Filled Worship During the COVID-19 Pandemic



St. Peter's United Methodist Church

July 6, 2020

St. Peter's UMC is planning to resume holding worship services in the Sanctuary when the State enters Phase 3 of its reopening plan.

This decision is based in part on guidelines from our Bishop, infection rates as reported by the Carteret County Health Department, and directives from the NCDHHS.

The State is scheduled to announce its plans regarding moving to Phase 3 on July 17, 2020.

While some people are ready to return to worship, others are not, and some may not plan to return until after a vaccine is available. If you have any concerns about being part of a gathering of people at the time we return to holding in-house worship, please do not feel obligated to come to church. We will continue to offer online worship resources to make worship accessible to all.

Each of us plays a role in helping to limit the spread of COVID-19, and we want to ensure that gatherings of our church family will not negate that role.

COVID-19 Task Force:

Karl Zorowski, Pastor
Jeff Bolduc, Lay Leader
Rodney Guthrie, SPRC Chair
Lee Austin, Trustees Chair
Carole Stalnaker, Church Secretary
Larry Lawrence, MD
Nancy Hutchinson, RN

St. Peter's United Methodist Church
Resuming Care-Filled Worship during the Pandemic

Congregational worship is one of the foundations of the Church. From the earliest days of the Christian faith, believers have gathered together in community to remember and celebrate what God has done through Jesus Christ:

Day by day [believers] were all together attending the Temple. They broke bread in their various houses, and ate their food with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and standing in favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being rescued (Acts 2:46-47).

In March of this year, the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 compelled our state government to place limits on public gatherings, and our Bishop requested that all churches in our Conference follow suit. Since that time, as part of our effort to help restrict the spread of the virus, we have not held in-person worship or other gatherings at the church.

In order to return to in-person worship, we must ensure that we provide a way for our church family to gather that reduces the chance of anyone being exposed to the virus. We must take into account that a number of our members are at a higher-risk of infection than others, and we have an obligation to look out for their welfare, as well as that of everyone else. For this reason, St. Peter's (through consultation between the pastor, Worship Committee, Staff Parish Committee, and our church's COVID-19 Task Force) is offering these guidelines to be followed as we return to in-person worship.

These guidelines are not permanent, but will be in place until the church can safely move forward to worship with fewer restrictions regarding physical distancing and prevention of infection.

Because we love God, we want to offer worship that brings our very best. Because we love our neighbors, we want to do everything we can to make sure we bring no harm to anyone when we gather.ⁱ

While we hope these guidelines will help protect individuals from catching the virus, our main goal is to prevent any of us who may unknowingly be infected from spreading it to others. Thus, we can work together to, as John Wesley teaches, "Do no harm."

Worship Practices

1. **We encourage those who may be at risk to stay home.** The church will continue to offer some form of online worship, even after we reopen the Sanctuary, in order to accommodate those who are at risk health-wise or may not feel ready to return to in-person worship.
2. **Masks:** We are requiring everyone to wear a mask or face covering inside the church building and during worship. *Wearing a mask is less an act of self-care and more an act of caring for others.* The church will have masks at the door on Sunday mornings for those who do not have one. An usher will be at the door to assist you.
 - a. Since parishioners are required to wear masks or face coverings, the worship leaders and assistants will do so as well.
 - b. Those under the age of 2 will not be required to wear a mask.
 - c. If you have a legitimate medical condition which prevents you from wearing a mask, please contact the church office to inform us prior to arrival. Those who cannot wear a mask will be asked to wear a face shield.
3. **Hand Sanitizer:** Bottles of hand sanitizer will be placed at the entrances to the Sanctuary. Each worshiper is asked to sanitize his or her hands upon entering the Sanctuary.
4. **Seating:**
 - a. Ushers will seat worshipers on every other row, with two empty seats between family groups and individuals. To preclude having persons pass by seated individuals, ushers will seat arriving worshipers beginning with the front row of available seats, and working toward the back of the Sanctuary.
 - b. At the end of the worship service, ushers will dismiss the congregation row by row, starting with the seats at the back of the Sanctuary or Narthex and working toward the seats in the front.
 - c. Physical distancing of six feet will be observed as worshipers enter and exit the Sanctuary. Entry and exit will be through the double doors leading from the Sanctuary to the Narthex.
 - d. There will be no receiving line following the service, and no social gathering in the Narthex prior to or after the service.
5. **Worship Times:** Our worship times will be at 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on Sundays, as well as 6:00 p.m. on Wednesdays.

- 6. Number of Worshipers:** In order to accommodate physical distancing, our gatherings will be limited to facilitate that distancing.
- a. Please contact the church office (call 726-2175, or email stpetersumc1962@gmail.com) **by Friday, July 10**, and indicate whether you desire to attend the 8:30 service or the 11:00 service, or whether you are flexible, or if you plan to worship from home for the present time. This will enable us to know what to expect number-wise. Because seating will be limited, we want to ensure everyone who wishes to attend will be able to.
- 7. Entering and Exiting the Building:** All persons shall enter and exit the building through the double doors at the main entrance to the church, or the double doors by the choir room. All other entrances will be locked, but will be accessible to exit the building in case of emergency. (If you enter the building by the choir room, please proceed down the hallway to the Narthex).
- a. Upon people's arrival, a greeter in the Narthex will ask a series of screening questions (see addendum A). If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes," that individual will be asked to return home, and will be invited to participate in our online worship.
 - b. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive, or have been exposed to the virus in the last three weeks, we ask that you please stay at home.
 - c. Due to extra time required for screening questions and ushered seating, we encourage people to arrive early.
- 8. Singing:** For the time being, we will have no congregational singing during in-person worship. "Recent studies have found that forceful, sustained breathing, such as during singing and playing brass and wind instruments, appears to pose a greater danger of spreading the coronavirus than ordinary speaking at a low volume."ⁱⁱ
- a. Music will be provided by our pianists, soloists, duets, and a chorus of four or less singers, or through prerecorded video. Singers will be six feet apart, and 12-16 feet from the congregation. There will be no choir or hand bells for the foreseeable future.
- 9. Unison Speaking and Congregational Prayers:** To reduce the risk of infection we will have no congregational spoken responses or prayers.
- 10. Children:** As always, children are welcome to be a part of our worship service.
- a. **Nursery:** For the time being, there will be no nursery available on Sunday mornings. Children will sit with their parents or guardians during worship.
 - b. **Children's Sermon:** in order to accommodate physical distancing, the children's sermon will be presented from the front with children remaining in their seats.

11. Passing of the Peace:

- a. Parishioners will remain in their seats, and may turn to their neighbor and offer a sign of peace such as a hand over the heart.
- b. There will be no physical contact between persons.

12. Communion: We will not observe Communion when we first return to in-person worship.

- a. When communion resumes, precautions will be taken to avoid contact exposure, and, as much as possible, to observe physical distancing.
 - i. Ushers will direct individuals to a station for receiving. Any lines will maintain six foot spacing between households.
 - ii. Juice and bread will be offered to parishioners in individual plastic cups.

13. Offering:

- a. To eliminate contact, there will be no passing of offering plates.
- b. We will provide stations at the Sanctuary exit where people can place their offering on their way out at the end of the service. Ushers will be standing within six feet of these giving stations.
- c. Counting Officers will wait until after the 11:00 service to process offerings from both services. Counters will wear face masks and gloves, and will practice physical distancing by using both desks (separated by at least 6 feet) located in the finance office. They will need to sanitize the finance office after its use.

14. Bulletins:

- a. As paper is a prime source for contact infection, printed bulletins will not be provided. Liturgy and all other information will be projected on the monitors.
- b. For those who desire a bulletin, one will be emailed to parishioners to print at home and bring to church.
- c. A weekly updated prayer list and announcements will be emailed to church members each week, with a hard copy mailed to those families without email access.

15. Restrooms:

- a. In order to accommodate physical distancing, only one person or family should be permitted to use the restroom at a time.
- b. People are asked to thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water after using the restroom, and to use sanitizer provided as they reenter the Sanctuary.
- c. People are asked to use the restrooms adjacent to the Sanctuary.

16. Worship Leaders and Assistants

- a. Worship leaders will have their own seating area.
- b. Leaders will do their speaking/singing at a safe distance (12-16 feet) from the congregation.
- c. Acolytes will enter and exit the Sanctuary through the door near the pastor's office.

17. Sanitizing the worship space:

- a. Prior to and following worship services, hard surfaces in the Sanctuary that are in contact with hands will be sanitized.
- b. Prior to and following worship services, fixture handles, countertops, and door handles in the restrooms will be sanitized.
- c. Bibles, hymnals, registration pads, and other items will be temporarily removed from the seats in the Sanctuary. Worshipers are encouraged to bring their own bible from home.

18. Guest Registers

- a. We will not use the registration pads in the pews. We will have someone at the door record the names of people as they enter.

19. Water Fountains will be disabled for health and sanitation purposes. Since the water fountains are disabled, you are encouraged to bring bottled water. Normal restrictions on the Sanctuary will be lifted during this time so you may have water with you during worship.

20. In Case of Emergency: If, during worship, you should feel sick or faint, please see one of the ushers. He or she will assist you. An emergency plan is in place to isolate and assist those in need, a copy of which is available from the church office upon request.

21. Other Gatherings:

a. Sunday School

- i. Due to the need to observe proper physical distancing, Sunday School classes will not gather in the building at this time.
- ii. Several Sunday School classes continue to "meet" via Zoom, email, and other formats. Classes are encouraged to continue to do so.

b. Small Groups

- i. According to State guidelines, during Phase 2 (effective May 22, 2020), "gatherings of more than 10 people in a single indoor space remains prohibited."ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, small groups in excess of 10 persons are not able to

gather in the church building at the current time. When the governor announces the opening of Phase 3, this figure will be updated.

- ii. If you have a group of 10 or less that wishes to meet, please contact the church office to reserve a space, and then follow the guidelines as set forth for the Youth Group (which began meeting on May 31):
 1. Youth Group
 - a. During their meeting time, Youth will be restricted to the Fellowship Building.
 - b. Masks for leaders and youth will be required until further notice.
 - c. Youth leaders will be responsible to wipe down and sanitize the area following the youth meetings.
 - d. Parents will drop off and pick up youth at the back entrance by the kitchen.
 - e. Until further notice, food will not be served at any indoor Youth gathering.
 - c. **Vacation Bible School:** Vacation Bible School will be an online program this year.
 - d. **Weddings and Funerals:** These services will be handled on a case by case basis.

With everyone's help in adhering to these guidelines, we hope to provide the safest possible environment for us to return, as a church family, to in-person worship and fellowship.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, please contact the church office at 252-726-2175.

ADDENDUM A

Screening Questions for Those Wearing a Mask:

1. Do you feel sick today?
2. Have you had a fever in the past week?
3. To your knowledge, have you been exposed to anyone with COVID-19 in last three weeks?

If the answer to any of these questions (1-3) is "yes," you will be asked to return home and invited to worship with us online.

Screening Questions for Those Not Wearing a Mask:

1. Is your absence of a mask for medical purposes? If so, then please answer the following:
 - a. Do you have any of the following symptoms:
 - i. Fever or chills
 - ii. Cough
 - iii. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - iv. Fatigue
 - v. Flu-like muscle or body aches
 - vi. Headache
 - vii. New loss of taste or smell
 - viii. Sore throat
 - ix. Congestion or runny nose
 - x. Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
 - b. In the past three weeks have you been exposed to anyone with COVID-19?
 - c. In the past three weeks have you or anyone you live with visited someone inside a hospital, nursing home, long-term care, or extended stay facility?
 - d. Have you or anyone living in your home tested positive for COVID-19?

If the answer to any of these questions (a-e) is "yes," you will be asked to return home and invited to worship with us online.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carteret County Health Department. <https://www.carteretcountync.gov/738/Health-Department>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coronavirus (COVID-19).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Duke Divinity School. *Returning to Church in Pandemic: A Planning Q&A for Church Leaders with Duke Infectious Disease Specialists* (Webinar). June 10, 2020. https://youtu.be/HMPG5_DcvXY.

Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments, The. *Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic*. 2020.

North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. *Model for Renewing Face to Face Worship*.

<https://nccumc.org/coronavirus/renewing-community/>.

North Carolina COVID-19 Information Hub. <https://www.nc.gov/covid19>.

ⁱ The Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments, (2020), 5.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 19.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nc.gov/covid-19/staying-ahead-curve/phase-2-faqs#what-is-the-new-mass-gathering-limit>;
accessed June 24, 2020.