

Friends and Members of First Presbyterian Church,

We have missed being together in-person for worship each Sunday.

While some people would like to begin to meet in person, many do not and should not for health reasons. We are doing our best to work together to allow everyone to fully participate (whether at home or in-person) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.

As we are anxiously awaiting the day when we can worship inside our church building again, the Coronavirus Subcommittee and the Session wanted to provide the congregation with some updates. We have been watching the current rates in our community, as well as updated recommendations provided by the MN Department of Health.

Several of us recently attended a virtual meeting with the MN Department of Health for Faith Communities. As you are probably aware, the current COVID-19 rates are the worst they have been during the pandemic thus far. They are expecting to see many more cases in the weeks ahead, stating that we are at a dangerous place right now, and need everyone to take COVID-19 seriously. Just because you can get together, does not mean that you are advised to do so. They emphasized the importance of wearing a mask, social distancing, washing your hands, and staying home if you are sick or at high risk. They reminded us that these strategies do not mean that it is safe, it means that it is safer. They stated that this pandemic requires bold leadership within the faith community that maintains the health and safety for the people they care about and are responsible for.

We are also aware of the need to get back into our church. Our church has done a great job providing outdoor in-person and recorded services, but we recognize that it is not the same as worshiping in the sanctuary. The Coronavirus Subcommittee has been asked to provide a plan of how we can safely get back into the church as soon as possible. Given the current number of cases, and the number of people in our church who are at high risk, the committee did not feel that now was the right time to re-open. This is not an easy decision, as we recognize that not everyone will be happy, but we feel a responsibility to keep each other safe, including our staff.

While we continue to support each other, pray for each other, and worship together from a distance, we are anticipating the day that rates start to improve, and we can come together again inside of our church. Unfortunately, we suspect that rates will continue to rise with the upcoming holidays. We therefore propose having a re-opening date of January 17th, 2021. This would be a change from our current plan, which states that we would not open until there is a vaccine. The reason for this change is to try to meet the needs of our congregation and re-open our doors sooner. We recognize that this is a fluid situation, and that date may be moved up, or possibly pushed back, depending on the number of cases at that time. We would continue to offer recorded services via Facebook and DVDs.

The Coronavirus Subcommittee and Property Committee met regarding improving the air quality within our building, as we do not have direct air exchange with the outside air. The session has approved the purchase of two HEPA air filters with ionization to help improve the air quality of the church. These units filter out pathogens, viruses, bacteria, mold, allergens, dust, and VOCs. The units do produce some noise, but they must remain ON during all functions to provide the needed air filtration. While these filters may reduce the amount of COVID-19 in the air, it does not necessarily prevent the spread of COVID-19. One could still be exposed before the contaminated air has reached the filter. Other safety measures would need to be followed as well. We have developed a plan that promotes social distancing within the church, wearing a mask, and hand hygiene. Following current guidelines, it would be a shortened service without any congregational singing. Please see attached worship plan for additional details.

We have also developed a plan that immediately allows for funeral services within our church, even though our church is currently closed. We feel it is important to have this as an option for families. This is not the ideal service that we would like to provide, as it only allows for a limited number of people to attend inside of the church. During funerals, it is natural for people to want to come together, hug, and support each other. Unfortunately, this makes it easier for the virus to spread. It can be difficult to maintain social distancing during such an emotional event, and outbreaks have occurred. While limiting the number of people allowed to attend inside of the church is difficult, we are trying to prevent further suffering. More people could attend outside, at the cemetery. Services would be recorded and made available online and via DVDs. A celebration of life could be offered inside the church later, when more people can safely attend. Utilizing a funeral home may be another option. Of course, once infection rates improve, and our doors are open, capacity limits for funerals would be re-evaluated.

Please view the in-person worship plan, the funeral policy, and the frequently asked questions page that are attached.

We remember the words that Jesus tells us in the gospel of Matthew, the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have been presented with an opportunity to love and care for our church family in a unique way. May we remember that church is more than a building. The church is the body for Christ. Please continue to reach out to our church family while we are not physically meeting.

We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as we navigate these challenging times together and keep each other safe.

In Christ,

The Session of First Presbyterian Church, Kasson, MN

Rev. Amanda Boss, Randy Carlsen, Thelma Givan, Robert Gransee, Tami Hanson, Gayle Kaufeld, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Mike Prenzlów, Paulette Riedel, Sheryl Scholer

The Coronavirus Subcommittee of First Presbyterian Church, Kasson, MN

Rev. Amanda Boss, Amanda Frodermann (RN, Parish Nurse), Sue Alberts, Jane Heser, Gayle Kaufeld

COVID-19 Pandemic In-Person Worship Plan for First Presbyterian Church, Kasson, Minnesota

Recommended by the Coronavirus Subcommittee:

Rev. Amanda Boss, Amanda Frodermann (RN, Parish Nurse), Sue Alberts, Jane Hesel, Gayle Kaufeld

Approved by the Session on November 9, 2020

Rev. Amanda Boss (Moderator), Randy Carlsen (Clerk), Thelma Givan, Robert Gransee, Tami Hanson, Gayle Kaufeld,
Jennifer Mittelstadt, Mike Prenzlów, Paulette Riedel, Sheryl Scholer

We will tentatively plan to begin in-person worship on January 17, 2021 at 10:00 am.

Due to the fluidity of COVID-19, cases in our area will be monitored by the Coronavirus Subcommittee and will adjust the start date accordingly.

Registration:

- We have the seating capacity for a total of 40 people in the fellowship hall and the sanctuary. Due to our limited number we will have a registration system in place.
- If you are interested in attending worship in-person, you can go to the church's Facebook page and click on the Sign-Up Form and register to attend. The Sign-Up Form link will also be emailed to you.
- If you do not have a computer or smart phone, please call 507-634-7481 and leave a message with your intention to attend worship by Thursday each week.
- Please indicate your willingness to be an usher as this is a vital role for our ability to be able to offer in-person worship.
- **For in-person worship to take place, we must have four volunteers available to help. These volunteers would assist with registration check-in and guide people to their seats. They would help dismiss people after the service as well.**
- **If we do not have four volunteers to assist with worship, we will not meet in person. The service will be pre-recorded and made available on our Facebook page on Sunday morning.**
- Communication about the status of volunteers will be communicated clearly to the congregation.
- In the event someone has not registered, if we have seats available, they are welcome to join us for worship. They will be asked to sign-in for contact tracing purposes and be guided by an usher to be seated.
- Everyone is strongly encouraged to register for worship because we only have 40 seats available in the space to meet the health department guidelines. We would hate to turn people away, but we will do so if we are at capacity.
- We will evaluate the need to register once we establish how many people will attend the indoor service.

Requirements for attending in-person worship:

- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth at all times.
- Maintain more than 6 feet from people not in your household at all times.
- Use hand sanitizer when you arrive and as needed.

- Affirm that you do not feel sick in any way.
- Affirm that you have not been asked to quarantine or have been exposed to COVID-19.

How worship will look different during this time:

- Offering plate will not be passed. The offering plate will be available at designated locations.
- 2 liturgical participants- pastor and musician.
- Service limited to 30 minutes to minimize time of exposure.
- (Short reflections instead of full-length sermons. No responsive worship elements.)
- No congregational singing. Music via organ/piano or another instrument.
- No hymnals or Bibles in pews.
- Children will not come forward for the children's time.
- Bulletins will be available so that you may follow along with the worship service.
- Restrooms will be open and available for use.

What to expect when arriving at church on Sunday morning:

- You will be greeted at the door (either front or back) of the church. If you do not have a reservation, you will be asked to sign in by an usher. Please do not congregate by the door while waiting your turn.
- The usher will help you find a seat that is safely distanced from others that are not in your household.
- At the end of the service, the usher will excuse each row to exit by the front and back doors.

COVID-19 Pandemic Funeral and Memorial Policy for First Presbyterian Church, Kasson, Minnesota

Recommended by the Coronavirus Subcommittee:

Rev. Amanda Boss, Amanda Frodermann (RN, Parish Nurse), Sue Alberts, Jane Heser, Gayle Kaufeld

Approved by the Session on November 9, 2020

Rev. Amanda Boss (Moderator), Randy Carlsen (Clerk), Thelma Givan, Robert Gransee, Tami Hanson, Gayle Kaufeld, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Mike Prenzlów, Paulette Riedel, Sheryl Scholer

Gathering to mourn for someone who has died, celebrating their life, and proclaiming the hope of Resurrection are essential practices of the Christian faith.

During the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 outbreak, our usual grieving rituals have been interrupted. We are unable to bring our church community together as we would wish to honor, grieve, and celebrate the lives of our members and friends who lived faithfully. We cannot join our voices together to sing the hymns and songs that bring us comfort. We cannot gather in person as a group to find comfort in the presence of one another. We cannot hug and hold one another as we entrust our loved ones to God's eternal care. We are waiting to feel the hope of resurrection.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz declared a State of Peacetime Emergency in Executive Order 20-01. The COVID-19 Subcommittee and the Session of First Presbyterian Church have added this funeral and memorial policy to the COVID-19 Response Plan.

Under Phase 3 of the COVID-19 Response Plan, and while the State of Peacetime Emergency is in effect we will be limited in our funeral practices in the following ways:

Funerals, Memorial Services, and Graveside Services

- a) A request may be made to hold a funeral or memorial service in the sanctuary. The service will be kept to thirty minutes. It is limited to 10 family members. A 6-foot distance is to be maintained between those not living in the same household. One pastor, one sound technician, and one organist/pianist may be present. The service may be recorded on a DVD at no additional cost and shared with friends and family.
- b) Using the Zoom online meeting platform, we can host a funeral or memorial service online. The service can be recorded, and participants will be present from their homes via a computer.
- c) The service can be streamed live over the church's Facebook page or on the Facebook page of a family member if that is the family's preference. The live stream can be saved and uploaded so others can watch the service later.
- d) We can gather for a short service at a gravesite with social distancing. We will follow individual cemetery guidelines. Masks must be worn by those in attendance.

Note:

We recommend outdoor graveside memorial services where possible as a preferred venue to limit the possible surfaces and spaces as sources of contamination. Using phones and tablets, via FaceTime and other sources, others can be present in a virtual way. The service can be recorded and distributed electronically.

Additional recommendations:

If the memorial service or funeral will be delayed and scheduled in the future, we recommend that the service be planned with the pastor and the family as soon as possible after the loved one's death and that those who will give words of remembrance and the pastor's words of faith be put together in written form.

Bulletins:

A memorial service bulletin can be provided. It may contain the following: selected scripture readings, a homily or sermon by the officiating pastor, eulogies, tributes, and pictures. The family may discuss their ideas for bulletins, memorials, and the inclusion of photos with the pastor. Creative suggestions are welcome.

Receptions:

First Presbyterian Church is not able to host a meal or reception following any memorial, funeral, or graveside service at this time.

While we are presently limited in what we can host, we are able to plan for memorials after the pandemic has passed. We would welcome the opportunity to host a memorial service for your loved one at a later date when we can all safely gather and celebrate their life.

Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Policies-approved by Session on 11/09/2020

What are we doing as a church for Advent services?

Advent services will be prerecorded on our Facebook page and DVDs will be available. We will use the One Candle liturgy for at home Advent wreaths. Everyone is invited to have a candle in front of them while they view worship. We will all light our candles together during the lighting of the Advent wreath, united by the light of Christ.

What other Christmas activities are planned?

Advent Virtual Bible Study will be offered on the Zoom platform.

Outdoor Christmas caroling is being scheduled and more information will be coming soon about that.

On December 20, in the afternoon, we will be offering a pre-recorded Service of Hope and Healing: Blue Christmas worship service. This is for anyone who is experiencing grief, loss, or sadness during the holiday season.

What about Christmas Eve?

There will be a prerecorded Christmas Eve worship service that will be available to view starting at noon on Christmas Eve on the church's Facebook page.

If the weather is good (not a blizzard) we will have a brief, outdoor Christmas Eve Service. This will be held on the church lawn at 5:30pm. We will hear the Christmas story, sing a few carols, and pass the light of Christ. We are working on getting a FM transmitter for people to listen to the service in their vehicles parked near the church.

When are we going to be back in the church building?

Session has approved a plan that has a tentative date of Sunday, January 17, 2021. Please refer to the In-Person Worship Plan for further information.

What about the air units? I thought those were going to get us in the church faster.

The Coronavirus Subcommittee and Property Committee met regarding improving the air quality within our building, as we do not have direct air exchange with the outside air. The Session has approved the purchase of

two HEPA air filters with ionization to help improve the air quality of the church. These units also filter out pathogens, viruses, bacteria, mold, allergens, dust, and VOCs. The units do produce some noise, but they must remain ON during all functions to provide the needed air filtration. While these filters may reduce the amount of COVID-19 in the air, it does not necessarily prevent the spread of COVID-19. One could still be exposed before the contaminated air has reached the filter.

Due to the rising COVID-19 cases Session agreed that while the air units will help with in-person worship, it is best to reopen after the holiday season.

According to the Funeral Policy there can only be 10 family members at a funeral service. What if I have more than 10 family members?

If you have more than ten family members that would need to attend the funeral service in person then we would recommend that you have that service at a local funeral home that can accommodate additional family members.

Family members can also watch the service via Zoom or Facebook live. See the Funeral Policy for additional information.

There are other churches in town that are open, why aren't we?

Every church has a choice of how they are going to handle the coronavirus pandemic. The Session of First Presbyterian Church made their decision by following guidance from the MN Department of Health and the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area. Given the current number of cases, and the number of people in our church who are at high risk, the Coronavirus Subcommittee did not feel that now was the right time to re-open. Session agreed with this recommendation. We are doing everything we can to ensure that our church members can worship safely. It is extremely difficult, but we know that bold leadership is required during these unprecedented times.

I have a question that you did not answer.

Any other questions can be directed to members of the Coronavirus Subcommittee. Their names are listed at the bottom of the letter to the congregation.