

## **Announcing Changes to Worship Practices, Effective December 12<sup>th</sup> 2021**

After much prayer and deliberation, our council has moved to revise our Covid-19 ministry plan, and as such, will be resuming singing during our worship services and removing the building capacity limit beginning December 12<sup>th</sup>.

We greatly appreciate the patience and flexibility that our members have endured to the disruption of our worship life over the course of the past 2 years. We have all grown weary of this season of disruption and share in the desire that we could stop talking about Covid-19. In these historic times of global pandemic, our church leadership has given much deliberation to how best hold the longing of our faith community to gather in ways that are familiar, balanced with the advice of health officials urging communities and households to physically distance and help prevent the spread of the virus.

While we would love to make this announcement with the exuberant celebration of a full return to normal, strains of Covid-19 remain a concern that families should account for in their assessment of risk. Vaccines, masking, and physical distancing continue to be the most effective community measures for safeguarding the folks most vulnerable to the virus.

However, we have heard the pain and frustration of our congregation and their deep desire to feel sustained by God's gifts of fellowship and joining together in song. As with all of our measures taken over the course of the pandemic, we pray that our choice finds a balance between the recommendations of health experts and the level of disruption our community is able to bear as we strive to live out our faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We will be maintaining our commitment to offering online worship for those who prefer to connect with us digitally, and we are excited that we will soon be resuming streaming our live Sunday morning worship services. We hope this will help our families who are still practicing physical distancing to feel a greater sense of connection to the worship of our broader faith community.

Members who have been worshipping online are welcome to reach out to the office to coordinate a visit from one of our pastors to provide home communion.

For those who gather for in person worship, we continue to recommend wearing masks and ask that everyone respect one another's desire for physical distancing. Our plan is to resume passing the offering plate, but we will still have the plate available in the Narthex for those who would prefer the ushers to pass them by. We will also be offering the option for worshippers to commune by either receiving the bread and the wine before the altar, or by communing from their seats with the individual communion kits.

Whether this most recent decision fills you with joy, disappointment, or some other mix of feelings, we know that measures around Covid precautions have been a divisive issue for our community. We urge all of our members to continue to ground their words and actions in Christ's call for us to cultivate grace and compassion. Though our community's pandemic response is a part of our faithful witness to Jesus' gospel, it has never been the sum total of our following of Christ's Way. It is still true yesterday, tomorrow, and today that each of us is both sinner and saint; people who are both in need of Jesus' grace and also bearing Jesus' love into the world through our efforts of compassionate care and work for justice. We pray that the Holy Spirit continues to guide us in our work of discernment, and trust that even in the most fractious conflicts God is with us in the mess. May the spirit of God continue to unite us as one body of Christ, in whichever ways are appropriate for us to connect with one another during this historic season.