



Derry Church

PRESBYTERIAN (USA)

September 18, 2020

It has been our joy to gather for worship under the shade of the oaks and around the baptismal font over the past two months. On average, 50 people attended these services and gave many of us an opportunity we'd longed for since mid-March.

Many people are longing for familiar routines and experiencing COVID-19 and Zoom fatigue. With deep care and intention, our COVID-19 Task Force has been working on a plan to allow Derry friends to gather with a more familiar schedule at the highest level of safety possible in these times. Our phases of reopening the building may lag behind those of state and other institutions and even some churches. We are proceeding with an abundance of caution and concern for the most vulnerable among us as we are guided by these principles which help us determine how and when to gather safely and purposefully:

- **Safety:** We prioritize the health and wellness of all God's people, sharing Jesus' special concern for the most vulnerable and marginalized. Our decisions are guided by the health and safety of our community, from our children to our oldest members.
- **Community:** We have a responsibility to our wider community. We are all in this together, and we must protect and support one another. Our commitment is to work from facts and to follow best preventive practices to keep ourselves and our community healthy.
- **Mission of the Church:** Through the work of the Spirit, we do not abandon our mission during this time of change. We continue to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation and community. The church is not the building, or in-person gatherings: it is the people of God loving in the way of Jesus. Over the past six months, we have discovered new ways to fulfill our mission that are transforming our church for the better and will be here to stay.
- **Mindfulness of Staff Resources:** We will not burn out the staff or make unreasonable requests. We will continue to use their gifts and skills in appropriate ways to the glory of God.
- **Transparency:** We will communicate often, clearly, and accurately the decisions we make and the reasons for those decisions.
- **Start with Small Groups:** We will start small to minimize risk, then determine interest in various types of gatherings and learn best practices through experience.
- **Outside when Possible:** Based on current science, research, and recommendations, we will gather outside whenever feasible. If outdoors is not an option, meetings will take place in larger, well-ventilated spaces with enough room for ample social distancing.
- **Adherence to Guidelines:** We will follow CDC, state, local, and denominational guidelines for our gatherings in order to be good neighbors and a good example to the community, while making use of the wisdom and work of others.
- **Learning from Best Practices:** We will learn from the failures and successes of other institutions whether they are church, school, business, or government, and we continue to be in conversation with local churches and our Presbytery.
- **Inclusiveness:** We are committed to ensuring that this situation will not impact some people more than others. We want as many people as possible to have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the church.

Continued



These principles serve to guide us as we determine how best to be the church in our current context. We are keeping all in mind as a lens through which to view and understand data, congregational desires, and recommendations. Using these principles as our guide, we offer these new opportunities:

Sunday School from 9:00-9:45 am beginning Oct 4: The adult Issues Class will meet in room 7 with a maximum of 25 people. Grades 6-12 will meet in the Youth Room with a maximum of 12 youth. Children (age 4- grade 5) will meet in Fellowship Hall with a maximum of 20. **Registration is required**, and each class will use dedicated bathrooms to limit exposure.

Chapel Worship from 8:00-8:30 am beginning Oct 11: The service for a maximum of 25 people will feature organ music, a sermon, and congregational participation through responsive readings and corporate prayers, but no singing. **Registration is required.**

Tuesday Evening Worship will continue outdoors for as long as the weather and daylight allow. On October 27, the Tuesday evening service will move into the Sanctuary, where the format will be similar to the Sunday morning Chapel service. An indoor service in the Sanctuary can accommodate a maximum of 60, which is significantly less than 25% capacity and provides for plenty of social distancing and a smaller number to test our processes and logistics as we move back inside. **Registration is required.**

All who plan to attend must wear masks and follow Derry Church's COVID-19 guidelines as listed on derrypres.org. To register for in-person gatherings, call the church office at 717-533-9667, use links in the weekly eNews or visit derrypres.org. **The Sunday livestream worship at 10:30 am will continue as usual.**

Groups of fewer than 25 people are welcome to gather at the church by signing up in advance for available space. One of our Bible study groups is now meeting weekly at the church. Our Puppet Ministry is meeting, and some committees are meeting in person. The music program is offering more in-person rehearsals.

If you feel comfortable and safe attending one of these opportunities, we would love to see you. *Please do not feel any pressure to attend any in-person gathering.* We will continue to offer online education, worship, and fellowship opportunities for those who cannot or choose not to gather in person.

We appreciate your patience and resilience. Under the guidance of our health, community, and denominational authorities, we anticipate a deliberate and gradual return to a familiar schedule, though we cannot predict when we will be able to safely return to church business "as usual."

This time is far more than a waiting period: it is an active fulfillment of our mission, and it is preparing us for the next good things God will do with us. As we long for and continue to consider a return to our building and customs, we will remain deliberate about decisions, guided by principles, vigilant about wellness, and protective of the vulnerable, while praying and working for the recovery of the community and world.

Thank you for your continued support, prayers, participation, and service in the name of Christ. Together, we are Derry. We are an inquiring, inviting, and inclusive Christ-Centered community that proclaims God's word, shares God's love, and practices God's justice wherever and however we are the church together.

In faith, hope, and love,

The Session of Derry Presbyterian Church