



August 21, 2020

Twenty-three Sundays.

It has been 23 weeks since we last gathered together for worship. We miss choir rehearsals, Sunday school classes, fellowship, and small groups. We miss hallway conversations and the gift of community. We miss volunteering. We may even miss our committee meetings!

While there are many losses to grieve, we as a congregation have not strayed from our mission to proclaim God's word, share God's love, and practice God's justice. We offer pastoral care by phone, through letters, on front porches, and in driveways. We are encouraged by digital hymn sings, devotions, and chapel services. We are gathering outdoors for worship.

We continue to support our mission partners locally and internationally by contributing financial support, providing meals, and building a classroom for a school. In June we shared conversations about racial justice through the 21-Day Race Equity Challenge and online book discussion groups.

On Zoom, we offer classes, tech talks, meetings and fellowship once a month after worship. We have worshiped together virtually since March 15 and this month new equipment was installed to improve our streaming capabilities.

We are strengthened by our congregation's financial support. Your generosity allowed us to pay our entire staff since the middle of March and we continue to support our mission partners. Even in these very challenging times, we echo the words of the Psalmist: "The Lord has done great things and we rejoice."

Results from the five-question online survey that was emailed on August 10 give us a sense of how the congregation is thinking about a few key areas of ministry. This survey was not meant to encompass all areas of church life or to serve as a referendum. Instead, it provides a baseline of what Derry members are thinking right now.

The survey reveals that most people are not yet ready to return to indoor worship. More are willing to attend a short service than come to an hour-long indoor Sunday service. When case levels begin to retreat in our area, short indoor services may be our best option.

**Based on survey results, state guidelines, and following the recommendation of our capable COVID-19 Task Force, Session has decided to continue worshiping on Sunday mornings by live stream and limit in-person gatherings on the church campus through September. Our COVID-19 Task Force will revisit this decision at its September meeting. We hope to gather in new ways with more people in October, but these decisions will be based on the situation at that time. We want to see what happens as schools reopen and the flu season emerges.**



So what does this mean?

You are invited to continue worshiping online with us at 10:30 am every Sunday. We will also offer outdoor worship services (watch for a new schedule of days and times) as well as pre-recorded services from the Chapel.

We will offer robust online opportunities for Sunday School, including a six-week Buz Myers' class on Zoom and additional pre-recorded options. We will wait until October to start Sunday School for children and youth because parents tell us their children will need time to adjust to new ways of attending school. Watch for small group outdoor fellowship opportunities for children and youth.

Small groups may continue to meet at church following guidelines limiting attendance to fewer than 25 people and following COVID precautions. If possible, groups should meet outside. Contact the church office to make a reservation for your small group or to schedule a time for meditation and prayer in the Chapel (717-533-9667).

We will work with families who want to have a funeral during this time, allowing for internments in our cemetery and Sanctuary services with a 25-person attendance target and following COVID precautions.

Derry Discovery Days Preschool plans to open the four-year-old class on September 21 and the three-year-old class on October 5. This will allow the preschool more time to see what happens with local school districts (which affects our teachers' availability), finalize staffing, and acquire new safety equipment like portable air purifiers and sinks. We hope that opening the preschool will begin our steady and phased return to in-person gatherings like Sunday School, fellowship groups, and indoor worship.

You may wonder why we would open the preschool while keeping most church activities closed. The preschool provides a limited, traceable number of registered and regularly attending children and teachers, and we are able to set safety protocols and guidelines that would not be possible to maintain on Sunday mornings. These new operating procedures follow CDC and state guidelines to

keep children and their teachers safe and well. The September 21 start date comes after our September Session meeting, in case changing conditions indicate a need to change our plans.

To protect everyone's health, we ask that no one come to the church campus with a fever or other COVID-19 symptoms, or if you have tested positive or been exposed to someone who is COVID-19 positive in a 14-day period. We continue to require that anyone over two years of age wear a mask and maintain six feet of space from anyone not in their household.

While this is not the late summer or fall we envisioned, these opportunities and precautions will help us continue to be the church for one another, the city, and the world. We know you miss coming to Derry in the ways we've all grown accustomed to, and we miss it, too. While it seems we have been living with COVID-19 for a long time, this is ultimately a temporary situation. We will meet and worship together again in the ways we all love and value.

Please understand that no decision we make will be universally popular. We take our call to be the leaders of this congregation very seriously. We have made the health and safety of our congregation and community a priority from the beginning, and we will continue to show our love and concern for one another by doing our part to mitigate the spread of this disease. We have been, and will continue to be, guided in our decision-making by health organizations, government guidelines, local medical professionals, our denomination, and the collective wisdom of our congregation.

Please be safe. Wear your mask. Pray for your church and know that we are praying for you. We are in this together, and we all have a role to play as we love and care for our neighbors. Thank you for continuing to be the church in new and innovative ways. Thank you for your patience, faithfulness, hope, and love.

In Christ's call and love,

The Session of Derry Presbyterian Church

# COVID-19 Update for Derry Presbyterian Church on August 6, 2020

By Jennifer McCall-Hosenfeld, MD, MSc

I am writing with an update from the Derry Presbyterian Church Task Force on Gatherings. For the past several months, church leaders and members from this group have been meeting regularly to review and advise the church on current data, guidelines, and the best way to serve our community in an era that is completely unprecedented. As a doctor I can say this: COVID-19 is a new disease entity. Experts in medicine and public health are learning more every day. There is still much to learn. If the advice you are hearing sometimes feels confusing, that is because it is. Science can be messy, and the advice you may have heard back in March 2020 could be different than what you are hearing now.

Our Task Force follows recommendations from Pennsylvania public health guidelines and the CDC, as well as information about the frequency and transmission of COVID in our local community to continue to inform Derry Presbyterian about what we can do to keep each other safe. Here are a few updates.

We are still in the “first wave” of SARS-CoV-2. In the US, according to Johns Hopkins, the number of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 is approaching five million and the number of deaths has surpassed 158,000 people (see: <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd-40299423467b48e9ecf6> for updated data). Between February and May, COVID-19 had become the third leading cause of death in the US, after heart disease and cancer (<https://www.businessinsider.com/covid-19-compared-to-other-common-us-causes-of-death-2020-5>), and according to the CDC, thousands more American have died compared to what would be “expected” based on usual mortality rates since March 2020 ([https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess\\_deaths.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/excess_deaths.htm)). What all of this means is that SARS-CoV-2 is still here, and it continues to spread, and people are continuing to die from this deadly virus.

As a physician, I am often asked, “Is XXXX safe?” Unfortunately, there is no way of determining the absolute safety of engaging in any activity at this point. Thus, the way I counsel patients about COVID-19 is all about minimizing risk. There is fairly good evidence that a person’s risk of contracting the virus (getting the virus yourself) or transmitting (giving the virus to someone else) can be lowered. At Derry Presbyterian Church, we are using these principles to guide our Task Force recommendations:

- 1. If you are over the age of two, wear a mask in public. I cannot emphasize this enough. Please ensure that your mask covers both nose and mouth. Let me say this again for those in the back: Please wear a mask that covers both nose and mouth. Wear it consistently.** Find a mask that is comfortable. A cloth mask with multiple layers of fabric is best. Please avoid masks with exhalation valves. Wearing a mask confers protection to the wearer. Most importantly, wearing a mask dramatically decreases the likelihood that you will unknowingly spread the virus to someone else. People may spread this disease when they are asymptomatic. Wear a mask to protect our community. If you feel that you are unable to wear a mask, please consult with your healthcare provider about the right strategy for you.
2. If you must gather, outdoor spaces are safer than indoor spaces. If you must be indoors, observe physical distancing and optimize ventilation and air exchange.
3. Observe physical distancing of six feet or more in all spaces, even outdoors, with people outside your family bubble.
4. The duration of time you are with another person increases risk of transmission. Keep visits brief.
5. The density of people in an area increases risk of transmission. If you are able to avoid crowds, please do so. Limit gathering sizes as much as possible, even outside.
6. Continue to observe strict hand hygiene: washing with soap and water when soiled and using an alcohol based hand sanitizer regularly.

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7. If you have any symptoms (fevers, chills, cough, shortness of breath, loss of smell, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting, body aches) please stay home. The CDC maintains an updated list of symptoms to observe: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.

At Derry Church, our Task Force continues to use these principles to guide our recommendations. Combining strategies – masking, physical distancing, limiting gathering sizes, hygiene, isolation if symptomatic – is the best way to reduce spread and keep our community safe. Remember it's a “both/and” rather than an “either/or.”

Please know that COVID-19 remains a bit of a “wild card.” As we approach school reopening, it is quite possible that transmission rates will increase in our community and this may change what we recommend. Seasonal respiratory illness (“cold and flu season”) may also change how we need to behave. Our guidance will continue to be dynamic and respond to local conditions.

A final note: on social media, it is quite common to see the sentiment expressed, “You do you...I'll do me.” Essentially what this means is that “you wear a mask and stay home, but I will continue to go out, meet others and I do not wish to wear a mask.” It seems on its surface to be a reasonable analogy, but unfortunately, this sentiment disregards a basic fact... we are all connected as a society. Thus, if you go to a store without a mask, you risk infecting others. Think about it this way: your “rights” to do whatever you please cease when they infringe on the rights of other members of our community to stay healthy. Epidemiologic data shows that the rates of spread of COVID-19 in a community relate most directly to the ways in which members of that community observe social distancing and masking.

We are all in this together.