



Derry Church

PRESBYTERIAN (USA)

November 19, 2020

On November 18, the Session met and discussed Derry's response to the ongoing COVID pandemic in light of rising case levels in our area. As always, our policies are based on guidelines set by the CDC and PA Department of Health, along with recommendations from the COVID Response Task Force.

We were fortunate to enjoy a brief respite in the late summer and fall, with a stretch of low community spread in our area that allowed us to have outdoor services and some indoor gatherings in relative safety. Many of you have shared how much you appreciated being back in the chapel or sanctuary for worship services and how much you enjoyed seeing your friends under the oaks on the front lawn. Many of us felt reenergized by those times and opportunities to gather for worship.

The safety of our church and community has been our utmost concern, so our gatherings have always followed CDC and Department of Health guidelines. The principles set down by our COVID Response Task Force have also served us well. We acknowledge that we have been cautious about in-person gatherings; some of you have appreciated that, some of you have been frustrated by that, and some of you feel we have not been cautious enough.

We are thankful that our safety precautions have worked. We have been able to host modified in-person worship and gatherings for those who have desired to attend while also providing a wide variety of digital options for worship, education, and fellowship. At the same time, we have avoided becoming the site of a superspreader event.

Over the past few weeks, cases have risen exponentially in our area and across the country. Local school districts, including Derry Township, are suspending in-person classes for the time being. On November 17, the PA Secretary of Health, Dr. Rachel Levine, announced new mandates meant to control the spread of COVID-19.

As we have since the beginning of the pandemic, we take seriously our responsibility to protect our church family and community. We will continue to follow or exceed all guidelines set by the CDC and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as part of our dedication to keeping our church and community safe. We also want to continue to meet the needs of our congregation and community.

Therefore, Session has taken the following actions:

- For the time being, we will suspend music ensembles that cannot wear masks and distance for worship. We know coming to church to record music for worship has been a source of joy for our musicians, and we hope the virus will get under control soon so we can continue making music together. We will continue to provide music for worship, including using pieces we recorded before making this decision and music from previous years.

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- Masks will continue to be required for all indoor and outdoor gatherings. This includes speakers, class leaders, singers, and preachers when a congregation or audience is present. This policy complies with PA guidelines and is recommended by our COVID Response Task Force.
- We will have fewer livestream participants on Sunday mornings so that multiple people do not have to speak without a mask in the same area at the same time. We will pre-record some of the worship liturgy and drop those videos in as we do other pre-recorded elements of the service.
- We will continue to offer the current schedule for in-person worship and gatherings. This includes an 8:00 am Sunday service, a 9:00 am Sunday School hour, and a 7:00 pm Tuesday service. So far, attendance at worship services has stayed below 25, so attendees have been able to maintain social distancing. Those who have attended have expressed sincere gratitude for the services and a desire to continue. The only major change is that all worship services will now be held in the sanctuary to take advantage of more space, better ventilation, and newer technology. Session has granted staff and any leaders of any in-person gatherings the authority to cancel a gathering anytime they feel it is unsafe to continue or if they are personally uncomfortable leading the gathering at that time.
- We are working on several models for Christmas Eve worship based on survey results and safe practices. We will share more information closer to Christmas Eve because the specific situation is likely to change. Our plan is to offer multiple digital options as well as some in-person options, whether those are inside, outside, or a combination of both.

The Session believes these measures will allow Derry to continue our ministry and mission as responsibly as possible in these times. We have learned a lot since March, and our safety protocols have worked. We will continue to trust our policies and procedures but will revisit all decisions based on new information and situations. We will continue to be flexible and adaptable and ready to make necessary changes. If you have questions or want more information about our safety guidelines and new measures, please reach out.

We are living through challenging times, but the people of Derry Church have weathered tougher times than these: a revolution, a civil war, two world wars, and the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic. We will persevere through this, too. No matter what, our goal is to meet and serve the spiritual and physical needs of our community by proclaiming God's word, sharing God's love, and practicing God's justice.

Stay strong, stay safe, stay connected, and stay hopeful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen McKeown-Whitch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Stephen