



INDEPENDENT  
Presbyterian Church

May 21, 2020

My dear Friends:

It is with great joy that I am able to tell you **our session has voted to return to in-person worship on Sunday, May 31, 2020**. In order to do this, we will be complying with our county mayors' Back-to-Business Plan in addition to the present interim advice of the Centers for Disease Control for the reopening of churches.

You will find many of the details of how we will do this in the enclosed On-site Worship Plan document. But here's a summary of what we intend:

- We will be offering in-person worship at our regular 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. service times.  
We will also Livestream those two services through our YouTube channel. **For the present time, we will not have Sunday school or nursery services available.**
- For each worship service, we will be able to seat approximately 250 worshippers on the floor area of our sanctuary, seated every other pew.
- In addition, we will be able to accommodate 150 worshippers in the Fellowship Hall.
- For those 65+ who are concerned about engagement with others, we have set aside the Chapel (for up to 50 worshippers) with its own entrance.
- For those, regardless of age, who are immune-compromised or who have other health concerns, we have set aside the Balcony (for up to 50 worshippers) with its own outside access at the front of the church.

This setup will offer capacity for 500 worshippers at both of our services. Based on our average weekly attendance, this should be sufficient and will be the way we operate through the summer.

In order to make sure that our church services are as safe as we can make them, we are asking you to do the following:

- We **strongly recommend** worshippers wear masks in our church facility. Should you forget a mask, we will have one to offer to you.
- We also encourage worshippers to maintain appropriate physical distance on the church grounds. While we recognize a deep longing for fellowship, we encourage you to converse outside and avoid shaking hands for the present.
- We are blessed with a number of entry and exit points in our sanctuary and our facility. We ask you to utilize all of these so we might avoid bottlenecks (especially at the end of the service) and might maintain appropriate physical distance from one another. Please consult the On-site Worship Plan for suggested entry/exit points.
- We ask you to take your worship booklet home or dispose of it in a trash can as you leave the service.
- And perhaps it goes without saying, if you are feeling poorly at all, please do not come, but instead, join us via Livestream.

**A NEW PEOPLE. A NEW MEMPHIS.**

In turn, we will have more operations staff to clean the facility thoroughly in-between services, more ushers and greeters to direct and seat you in the various worship places, and ministers in each worship space to lead you in worship.

There may be other questions that you have; hopefully, the enclosed On-site Worship Plan will answer those. Undoubtedly, we will learn a lot from our first week back and will adjust as we go forward. But as I close this letter, I want to mention two things.

First, I want to urge this as strongly as I can: if you do not feel comfortable being out right now and attending church in person, then please do not come, but continue to join us through our Livestream. We recognize this is a strange and fearful time. While it seems the virus is abating in our area, we confess that we do not know fully what the outcome of returning to worship (and stores, offices, and schools) will be. We want you to use your best discretion for you and your family—and if that means staying at home for now, that is perfectly fine.

But second, I also want to encourage us all. Different people are going to come to different positions on a range of issues on the best way forward: some are zealous for masks; others are not. Some are wanting still to avoid all contact with all families; others have been having playdates for weeks. Some wish we would wait longer for public worship; others wish we were already back.

My encouragement, my plea, is that we live as the Apostle Paul taught us: “Live in harmony with one another...If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:16, 18); and “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?” (Romans 14:10). These passages remind us that our responsibility is ultimately for our own actions. If each of us seeks to live peaceably while we follow our consciences on how to engage in these times, and if each of us gives the other that same space and grace, then we will be able to navigate the coming days united in the bonds of brotherly affection and common union. That’s my deep hope and prayer as we return to in-person corporate worship together.

In the grip of God’s grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large 'S' and 'L'.

Rev. Sean Michael Lucas, PhD  
Senior Pastor