

Session Guidance for the Re-Opening of First Presbyterian Church

At the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, Senior Pastor Bob Fuller stated in his Moderator's Report that the virus and shutdown would significantly change the church and change how we do ministry. Since that time, the church has, indeed, seen many changes and made a number of adjustments. Some things will be seen as less important; others will be recognized as essential. The Session recognizes that this period of change may reveal new opportunities for proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, new ways to connect as a congregation, and new ways to see and help address the changing needs of the community. The Session, therefore, encourages the congregation and the staff to step out in faith, be willing to accept risk, and be open to new ways of loving Christ, loving each other and loving the city.

The Session, therefore, adopts the following guidance for the re-opening of First Presbyterian Church. The Recommendations for Interim Operations approved on March 26, 2020, are rescinded and are superseded by this Session Guidance.

A. Worship Services.

1. Governor Greg Abbott has recognized religious services conducted in churches as "Essential Services." The Session of First Presbyterian Church, therefore, encourages the exercise of First Amendment rights to the fullest extent possible, consistent with the guidance of U.S. and state directives.

2. The Governor has issued Minimum Standard Health Protocols for churches and places of worship. The Governor and Attorney General have also issued their joint Guidance for the operation of houses of worship. First Presbyterian Church will follow these guidelines to determine how and when to re-open.

3. On May 24, 2020, a live service will be held at 11:00 a.m. as a "trial run" for subsequent live services at the church. An online service will be held at 11:00 a.m. for the officers of the church and their families.

4. On May 31, 2020, Pentecost Sunday, First Presbyterian Church will hold two live worship services. The Traditional Worship Service will be held at 9:30 a.m. in sanctuary. The Contemporary Worship Service will be held in Westminster Hall at 11:02. Because of the city and county limitations, seating is limited. Overflow for both services will be in Covenant Hall. The seating in Covenant Hall will be cleaned between services in accordance with government guidelines.

5. On July 5, 2020, or such date to be determined by the Session, First Presbyterian Church will plan an outdoor worship service at a venue to be determine and in accordance with the rules and guidelines in effect at that time. If allowed, a picnic should be held following the service.

6. Summer Worship Services. For the Sundays through August 16, 2020, two live services will be held, a Traditional Worship Service at 9:30 and a Contemporary Service at 11:02. An on-line service will be offered at 11:00 each week.

The Session discussed holding a “blended” service or services. FPC currently has two venues for worship, two styles of music, two dress codes, two sermons and two different pastors leading worship. A blended service would include a combination of traditional hymns and contemporary music, including contemporary “standards” such as “In Christ Alone,” and others that have become mainstream. After discussion, however, the Session voted not to make a change at this time.

7. Health Protocols for Serving Attendees. All live worship services should be conducted in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Governor and Attorney General of the State of Texas:

- a. The Session strongly encourages those persons in high risk health categories and persons over the age of 65 to continue to watch or participate in worship services remotely.
- b. Because of concerns of the health of our congregation, the church will not designate an area inside the facility reserved for at-risk population or offer separate service for at-risk population attendees only.
- c. Persons attending worship services in person should comply with the Governor’s task force guidelines in effect at the time. Currently, these are:
 - (1) Participants must sit at least 6 feet apart or leave two empty seats between them.
 - (2) Two or more members of the same household can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or six feet separation) empty on either side.
 - (3) Two individuals who are not members of the same household but who are attending together can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or six feet separation) empty on either side.
 - (4) Alternate rows between attendees (every other row left empty).
 - (5) Seating at services must also comply with occupancy requirements issued by the City of San Antonio. This will require posting the certificate of occupancy limits in a conspicuous place in the rooms where services are held.
 - (6) Masks should be worn by all employees and volunteers escorting participants to the services. The Session encourages congregants to wear masks, especially in hallways and when they are being seated, as well as during services.
 - (7) Handwashing and hand-sanitizing stations should be set up around the church.

- (8) To avoid having to turn participants away as a result of the seating limitations, an on-line sign-up sheet should be used. Members are asked to sign the sheet and provide the number of family members who will be attending.

8. Health Protocols for Employees and Volunteers. The Session requests that the Senior Pastor, in consultation with the ushers, develop appropriate health protocols for employees and volunteers for training employees and volunteers on appropriate cleaning and disinfections, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, in accordance with the guidance from the Governor and Attorney General. This would include proper cleaning of surfaces used during worship.

9. Objects in Worship. During the summer months, objects that would be touched by a number of individuals will not be used. This includes bulletins, welcome pads, and offering trays. The order of worship will be shown on a screen. Communion will not be served during this time.

10. Online Services. The use of online services should continue indefinitely. These may be recordings or, upon setup of newly approved equipment, made available by live-stream service.

B. Opening of Offices, Facilities.

11. Protocols for Facilities. The Session requests that the Senior Pastor, in consultation with the staff, develop appropriate health protocols for employees. These should comply with the Governor's guidance in effect at the time, which include the following:

- (a) Household and maintenance staff should return to work on May 11 to prepare for the church facility for worship and office use. The staff should work in shifts or at staggered times and maintain social distancing in accordance with the Governor's guidance.
- (b) Office staff should begin returning to work on May 18, following the Governor's guidance for offices. Those with individual offices should be able to return sooner. Staff members who do not have individual offices should work in shifts or at staggered times and maintain social distancing in accordance with the Governor's guidance. Those over 65 or in high risk categories are encouraged to continue to work remotely. Those returning to work should comply with the building occupancy restrictions of 25% of capacity, or such regulation as may be in effect at the time.
- (c) The first live service (pilot test) should be held on May 24, 2020.
- (d) The Pentecost Service should be held May 31, 2020.

12. Memorial Services and Weddings. Following CDC and guidance from the Governor's Office, the church will perform only private funeral services for the immediate family until such time as larger gatherings are authorized. This policy will be reviewed as additional guidance from the State of Texas is received.

Weddings may be held in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order of May 5, 2020, or such order or guidance in effect at the time of the wedding. Weddings should follow the same guidelines in effect for worship services.

13. Education. Bible studies, education class and small groups will continue to meet virtually until in person meetings are authorized by government guidance.

14. Events. KRL, Loaves & Fishes and other events will remain canceled until authorized by government guidance.

15. Meetings. Meetings will continue to be held virtually until in-person meetings are authorized by government guidance.

C. Children's Center. The Session recognizes the importance that, as people return to work, they have access to child care. Under the Governor's Executive Order of May 5, 2020, teachers and staff could return to the building to conduct remote instruction and to perform administrative duties. Subsequently, the Governor authorized day care centers to open on June 1, 2020. The Session requested that the Children's Center Committee, in conjunction with the Director of the Children's Center, Business Manager Janet Slayden and representatives of the Personnel Committee and the Stewardship & Finance Committee, prepare a plan for re-opening the Children's Center, in accordance state and municipal guidelines. At the request of this committee, the Session subsequently approved opening the Children's Center on June 1, 2020.

D. Finances. The Session recognizes that there may be a decline in revenues during this time period. Based upon the recommendations of the Stewardship & Finance Committee, the Session approves the continuation of current spending plans based on the 2020 budget and the use of funds in the undesignated funds (approximately \$400,000). This policy will be reassessed as additional information becomes available and upon the recommendations of the Stewardship & Finance Committee.

E. Outreach to the Congregation. The Session recommends that the Diaconate resume meetings and that it take the lead responsibility for outreach to those in the congregation, including "Have a Need, Fill a Need," regular calls to the congregation, including regular attenders as well as Covenant Partners, and calls to those who have been sick or in the hospital.

F. Outreach to the Community. The Session recognizes that COVID-19 and the attendant shutdown is not just a health crisis or a financial crisis. It is a fracturing of society, with particular hardship borne by families, persons in lower income brackets, young adults and the elderly. The Session of First Presbyterian Church therefore makes outreach to the community a high priority:

1. Benevolences. The Session reaffirms its commitments to its mission partners, as set forth in the 2020 budget, and directs the missions committees and staff to take appropriate action to ensure that these commitments are timely honored.

2. Special Resources. The Session recognizes that, in these extraordinary times, additional measures are needed. The Session, therefore, authorizes, in principal, the use of unrestricted funds to meet the extraordinary needs of mission partners. The amount of these funds will be determined after receiving the recommendations of the COVID-19 special task force formed on April 22, 2020. The Session recommends that the task force consider recommending that funds from the unrestricted funds be used as a “challenge” gift and that the congregation and friends of this church be encouraged to contribute to the designated causes.

Approved May 6, 2020.