

## COVID - 19 Re-Gathering Task Force Initial Recommendations

Session appointed the following individuals, representing varying ministry areas and populations, to develop guidelines for re-gathering: Meredith Bullis, Julie Henry, Bob Johnson, Angie Keith, Jason Troiano, and Ken Worsham, with staff support from Rev. Mitzi Leshert-Thomas. They began work Wednesday, June 10th grounded in a faith which calls us to *love our neighbor as ourselves* (Matt. 22:39), *to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience*, (Col. 3:12) *and to care for the least of these among us*. (Matt. 25:45) Because we love God we offer our best in our work and worship. Because we love our neighbors, we want to do everything we can in an effort to bring no harm to anyone when we re-gather.

The task force carefully reviewed current information on virus transmission, the unique challenges facing churches, current [DHHS guidance on group gatherings](#) and the policies of other congregations.

With affirmation for the careful, measured actions taken to date and a clear desire to prioritize care for the most vulnerable among us the task force agreed upon the following guiding principles:

- We will seek to love our neighbors - prioritizing & modeling care for the vulnerable and seeking the common good
- We will, at a minimum, adhere to guidance and guidelines put forth by governing bodies and public health authorities.
- We will review information and guidance regularly, revising recommendations as needed and when appropriate
- We will be sensitive to the loss felt as we have not gathered for in person worship
- We will continue to livestream worship and strive to make all small groups, studies, and committees accessible via Zoom or a similar platform even when limited, in person, groups begin to regather.

The Task Force recommends a phased approach to re-opening based on current guidance from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. This first set of recommendations would be effective from Session approval through Sunday, September 6 (Labor Day weekend) and applies to all CPC sponsored activities on or off campus.

1. If you or a household member have had symptoms of COVID illness, if you have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or if you have tested positive for COVID-19, we ask you not to attend in person church activities until 14 days have passed since symptom resolution or date of testing.

2. Anyone entering or inside the church building for any reason shall wear a mask at all times. For those who do not have a mask, disposable masks will be available at keypad entry points.<sup>1</sup>
3. Sunday Worship shall continue to be livestreamed to the main Cary Presbyterian Facebook page and/or made available virtually via other recorded or streaming platforms. For the safety of all we will not meet in the sanctuary for worship at this time.
4. Church Groups (committees, ministry teams, youth groups, bible study groups, circles...) are strongly encouraged to continue virtual gatherings utilizing Zoom or other similar platforms as their primary means of work, study, and fellowship. However, per [DHHS recommended guidelines](#), Church groups of 10 or less may meet inside provided the following guidelines, set forth by CPC, are met and maintained.
  - a. Any Church group of 10 or less wishing to meet in the building shall contact the office to schedule the day, time, and location at least 1 week prior to gathering. This is to ensure appropriate distancing both within and between groups who may wish to use the building and to allow for cleaning.
  - b. No more than 2 groups shall use the campus (inside or outside) on any given day. If both groups wish to be inside, one group will meet upstairs, one group downstairs. This allows for appropriate distancing while entering, exiting, and moving in hallways.
  - c. Restroom access will be limited to 1 family unit at a time.
  - d. All participants shall practice appropriate social distancing..
  - e. Meeting leaders shall work with staff or use other resources to ensure access to participate in the meeting, study, or gathering is available to all regardless of physical presence in the building.
5. [Per DHHS guidelines](#), Church groups of 25 or less may meet outside on church grounds utilizing the yard, playground, columbarium, labyrinth, and outdoor chapel.
  - a. Any Church group of 25 or less wishing to use the campus shall contact the office to schedule the day, time, and location at least 1 week prior to gathering. This is to ensure appropriate distancing both within and between groups and to facilitate access to bathrooms and appropriate cleaning.
  - b. Groups meeting outside are encouraged to practice social distancing.
  - c. Per DHHS guidelines, participating individuals over 10 years old shall wear masks. Children 10 and under are strongly encouraged to wear masks as practical.
  - d. Restrooms in the building may be used by groups meeting outside, with access to the building and to the restroom limited to 1 family unit at a time.

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Edge, church member and daughter of Frank and Lela Floyd has provided a large quantity of masks to aid in re-gathering safely

The Task Force will continue to monitor updated guidance and seek input from the congregation to make additional recommendations for Session consideration about the path forward for the coming months. The Task Force also proposes to host a Zoom-based Town Hall meeting on Sunday, August 2, immediately following worship to invite feedback from the congregation on the guidance and suggestions about future planning.

#### Pertaining to Cary Presbyterian Preschool

- Cary Presbyterian Preschool is a vital mission of Cary Presbyterian Church. Their Board of Directors is diligently researching and in conversation regarding reopening in the fall. In agreement with CPC their plans for regathering center on a sensitivity to particularly vulnerable populations, care for the least of these, and the well-being of the CPP family.
- They will be adhering to [DHHS guidelines](#) specifically addressing childcare settings.
- They shall be in regular conversation with the Re-Gathering Task Force and will develop their own policies and guidelines regarding regathering in the fall.

#### **Background**

Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup> began a week of wondering; what was coming, was it worsening, what did it mean for work, schools, churches, and worship. Was there enough hand sanitizer? Or toilet paper? On Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> we were amending worship to minimize contact. Late on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> the session of CPC unanimously decided to cancel Sunday morning worship services until further notice. Shortly thereafter, with a watchful eye on CDC and DHHS recommendations as well as the Executive Order to shelter-in-place most CPC staff began working, primarily, remotely and the campus was closed to all committees and groups.

Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup> dawned with an experiment in worship on Facebook live. In the following weeks leadership arose within this talented and dedicated community enabling worship, from the sanctuary, to be live streamed to Cary Presbyterian's main Facebook page. Since then we've engaged varying formats for worshipping together utilizing Zoom, Facebook, and the OBS platform for streaming. The bulletin, complete with hymns is available on-line. Additional artwork for reflection was added. Slides containing the scripture readings and liturgy were included in the livestream. We've enjoyed soloists, instrumentalists, broken bread together and continued to share our joys and concerns. Through it all we've worn masks and worked at social distancing.

Bible studies continued as new ones began. Presbyterian Women have circled up from far and wide. Our families and children are being supported with a wealth of resources. Youth have met for study and fellowship via Zoom and our graduates were celebrated with a drive in Baccalaureate. Deacons are calling, delivering meals, praying, and calling again. Members

made masks for any in need. Calls for help were heard and answered through the CPC and larger community.

Make no mistake – Cary Presbyterian Church continues to flourish - for the church of Christ is not bound by walls of wood or stone – it is but a temporary shelter for those sent as servants to the world. This is not about the church *re-opening*, it is about how and when we might *re-gather*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the past three months much has and continues to change. On Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup> a U.S. District Judge issued a temporary stay on Governor Cooper’s Executive Order limiting indoor gatherings as it pertained to houses of worship. This decision effectively freed houses of worship to make their own choices regarding indoor or outdoor gatherings prompting the need for CPC to establish guidelines for safe re-gathering.