

# Venice Presbyterian Church

May 20, 2020

Dear Venice Church Members and Friends,

As Pennsylvania moves toward a re-opening of economic and social activities, the session of Venice Church is formulating a re-opening plan for in-person activities for our congregation. Many people at the church have worked very hard and very creatively to maintain our ministry through the difficult time of the shutdown. It is very important that we navigate the re-opening process wisely, carefully, and above all graciously. It would be quite sad if we were to ruin all the hard work of the past few months by allowing conflict to arise among us over our re-opening plan.

The leadership of Venice Church (officers and staff) is carefully reviewing resources from the CDC, state health department, our insurance carrier's safety library, and guidance from our denomination and other church ministry organizations. Currently, we have set no specific timetable for re-opening. At our meeting this evening, session will be considering what we need to do in order to be ready to set such a timetable.

Under the current state health department guidelines, gatherings of 25 people or less are permitted with the expectation that social distancing will be practiced in such gatherings. We will be exploring ways to gather for worship that will remain within those guidelines, as we also prepare for the time when we will be able to gather in larger numbers.

Part of re-opening our church *graciously* means recognizing that individuals assess risk differently. We cannot ever remove all risks involved with re-opening our in-person activities. Neither should we hesitate to do all that we can to allay as many fears as we can. We will ask everyone to bear with one another. That means that we may ask you to put up with safety measure that you personally do not feel are necessary for the sake of some of your brothers and sisters who do feel that they are necessary.

This approach to church life is not from the CDC. It comes from a higher authority: "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4) and "Take delight in honoring each other" (Romans 12:10) and "No one should seek their own good, but the good of others." (1 Corinthians 10:24). Let us make these guidelines be the ones that lead us.

In all likelihood, some of you may find my actions to be unnecessarily cautious. But please understand my position. A simple internet search of "church Covid outbreaks" brings up a sobering number of media reports on churches that have sparked local community outbreaks. If something goes wrong with our re-opening plan because we were not sufficiently careful, public health authorities and maybe also the media will ask me to explain that. I feel that responsibility,

and it makes me inclined to be cautious. In two years from now, I do not want to look back on 2020 and think, “I wish we had been more cautious.” So, please, bear with me. Venice Church’s future is very important to me. I don’t want to do anything that might unnecessarily endanger it.

As we embark on what will likely be the hardest part of our Covid19 journey, let’s all commit ourselves to making love the hallmark of all that we do—love for God, love for one another, and love for our neighbors. If we do that, this will be a glorious time for the people of God everywhere and in particular for his people at Venice Church.

Yours in Christ’s Love,

*Gary*

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