



July 31, 2020

Dear FPC Family and Friends,

The Reopening Advisement Committee has been monitoring conditions in the Covid-19 pandemic while planning a return to in-person worship. Conditions in recent weeks have changed rapidly, going from improving to bad to worse in a short amount of time. We utilize multiple data sources, looking for trends that show a significant improvement in the reduction of transmission and positive tests. As of this week, it is apparent that the trend is not headed in a direction which gives us confidence that now is the time to return to in-person worship.

We are also monitoring our community's response to Covid-19. Our local school systems made an abrupt decision to return to virtual learning. Our local governments, judicial courts, and other institutions are operating under very restrictive standards. Restaurants are open, but with different hours and methods of maintaining physical distance. Many businesses are now requiring customers to wear masks. Some churches have returned to in-person worship only to suspend or modify even further the worship environment – moving outdoors or back to virtual. The Reopening Advisement Group will continue to meet and evaluate the criteria/benchmarks we have identified. When we see significant improvement (which may take several weeks), we will propose a new date to Session for approval.

As for FPC Marietta, we have never closed. Our worship services, Sunday School, Wednesday Prayer Service, and countless other groups have merely shifted from in-person to online. The work of the church has continued, including feeding hungry children and families, providing necessary maintenance to our facility, creating new programs and infrastructure for ongoing virtual programming, and learning new ways to reach our congregation, keeping them socially and spiritually connected when physically apart.

Beginning in mid-August, FPC Weekday Preschool and Club 3:30 After School Program will resume on a limited basis in a highly restrictive environment. Protocols will include temperature taking upon arrival, masks, hand washing, and physical distancing in age-appropriate ways. Child and staff health will be closely monitored, and other protocols will be implemented in the event of illness. These populations are much smaller than the overall church membership, therefore they will be much easier to monitor.

Other groups are beginning to meet in-person, typically outdoors, observing physical distance guidelines, and/or wearing masks when physical distancing is not possible. These groups must reserve time/space for events by contacting Becca Yan.

We can do our part in reducing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. We can wear masks, maintain physical distance, and wash our hands. We can also take care of one another by writing a note, calling a friend, joining a Zoom Sunday School class, watching the Wednesday Prayer Service, connecting with our Neighborhood Group, inviting a friend for a physically distanced visit outdoors.

Some amazing stories have surfaced. Two of our members who live in a senior retirement community worship together every Sunday via livestream. Our friend from Australia joins us each week because she finds great comfort in worshipping with us. Many people have become engaged in providing messages of hope and inspiration each week for the Wednesday Prayer Service. We have fed hundreds of children and families through MUST Summer Lunch and Food Bank drive through distributions. We have even welcomed two new families into the membership – all conducted through new member classes and Session meetings via ZOOM.

God has equipped us to continue making disciples, just in very unexpected ways. And when we look back on this time, we will see just how fruitful this unusual period in the life of the church has been. In the words of Paul, Romans 8:28: We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Joe Evans