

Faith Presbyterian Church

620 S. Shirley St., Tacoma, Washington 98465
Telephone 253-752-7601 • E-mail: fpc@faithtacoma.org

May 30, 2020

To the Congregation of Faith Presbyterian Church,

Many thanks to those of you who have written with your comments to the pandemic planning committee. We are reading them all and encourage you to continue sending helpful comments, advice, and questions to the dedicated e-mail address. (Note: We sent this out to the congregation by email. If you did not receive it, [please contact the church office.](#))

We met again for 2-1/2 hours on Thursday evening, May 28th, and we are in the process of updating the Session this weekend. We will continue to advise you immediately about specific plans as they become available.

The committee has asked me to respond to your input as well as update you in general. Without quoting your comments and questions directly, the following paragraphs address the common themes in the e-mails we have received so far.

As you know, the situation is changing rapidly, and in Tacoma and Pierce County, the news regarding viral cases and hospitalizations continues to improve. There is a reason for thanksgiving to our merciful God!

As we move forward in response to this disease, it is going to be vitally important that *we act in unison, in love for one another, as the Body of Christ*. We can diminish the likelihood that one infected person will spread illness to one or two others. But more importantly, we must take the steps necessary to prevent one person from spreading this illness to 30 or 50 others at one time. Whatever our response looks like in the specific details, it will almost certainly involve **masking, distancing, hand hygiene, and an individual willingness to stay home and away from others when we are ill**. Alone, each step is insufficient but, taken together, they are a powerful deterrent to viral spread.

The officers are working hard preparing to deal with this viral disease and the attendant risks to our congregation. There is much to be done, and we will need many willing hands to help.

The frequent comparisons of COVID 19 to influenza have obscured the fact that this viral disease is unique, dangerous, and remains very incompletely understood. You need to know that the medical professionals caring for and studying COVID patients are generally quite alarmed. The comment, "We've never seen anything like this before," is becoming common.

You should be aware, for instance, that (quite unlike influenza) roughly 5% of folks in their 50s who develop COVID-19 wind up in the hospital. That rate goes up further with increasing age. I did a quick run through the church directory and counted over 125 people whom I know are over 50 years of age. In the directory, I counted over 30 people who are either over the age of 80 or have serious high-risk health problems, or both.

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As the virus has become better understood, it is more apparent that the primary mode of transmission is respiratory, and that people who are still a day or so from developing the symptoms are often highly infectious. And at this point, we have no way to identify those asymptomatic carriers who will put others near them at risk.

It is also more clear that a very efficient way to spread the virus widely is to pack large numbers of people into an enclosed space, have at least one symptomatic or asymptomatic carrier, and then sing or speak together for an hour or more. The reality is that congregational worship is a much higher risk event than shopping at Costco.

Like you, the officers of FPC are extremely desirous of resuming our worship and all aspects of our lives together as soon as possible. We are not operating in fear. We have not placed our confidence in science, but rather in the God whose orderly creation makes scientific study possible. We are not burning incense to emperors, but we are acknowledging our obligations to the civil authority God has established over us and to sacrificially love our community neighbors as the Scripture instructs us to do. And we have not forgotten our obligations to worship together nor are we unmindful of the losses we are all suffering in this time.

For those wishing help to find the right balance and wisdom as they face some of these same questions in their households, we encourage you to contact an elder directly to talk through the spiritual implications. We don't have "one size fits all" solutions for you, but we would love to be of service to you in that way.

As we live through this pandemic we will need, together, to observe universal precautions for the coming months, for as long as SARS-COV2 is a threat. We will gather again, soon (the Lord willing), as soon as we can all learn, together, how to protect one another and especially the most vulnerable among us. Again, more details will be coming, but we want to encourage you to be mindful about masks (my mask protects you from me, and yours protects me from you), distancing (6 feet isn't magic, but it is reasonable), hand hygiene (wash, wash, wash...this virus dissolves in soap and water), and staying home when ill (no one will ever criticize you ever again for staying home with a mere cold).

We cannot eradicate this virus, and so we will have to learn to live with it. In reliance upon God's grace, we will learn together, and fast.

Blessings to all,

Ryan Gross M.D.

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