



First Presbyterian

CHURCH OF BRISTOL

June 16, 2020

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Psalm 13:1 records a critical question many of us have been asking for some time: “How long, O Lord?” In the Psalmist’s case, the question was how long the people would have to suffer persecution and defeat. In our case, the question has been how long we would have to endure the prospect of continued distancing and restrictions on so many things we have taken for granted, especially our gathering as the church.

I don’t have a definitive answer for the question of how long our struggle will continue, but I am pleased to say that we are ready to take another step forward on the path to recovery. Our transition into Phase II is not a complete return, but it is an advance, and we ask you to both support the decision of the session and celebrate that we are taking this step. Again, I know that this plan will not please everyone, and there is much that we cannot offer yet, but there are advances here.

There are two points I would like to cover before I get into the details of our plan. First, parents of younger kids should be aware that the nursery will not be open during this phase of our plans and that, while we will offer Kids’ Kirk outdoors or in the chapel, children’s Sunday School will remain online. Our survey of your comfort levels made it clear that the vast majority of you are not ready to resume these activities, especially if they are held indoors. We have heard you, and this plan reflects where many of you are. Second, Phase II continues to emphasize social distancing, masks, hygiene, and the like, though less rigorously than Phase I. I understand that masks are not comfortable. At the same time, they are essential if we are going to sing together. Most important, masks are critical if we are going to be good neighbors by loving others as we love ourselves. Masks help protect others from what we might be carrying; they are a public witness of love.

I want you to know that countless hours of prayer and thought went into developing these plans. Thanks to our Stewardship Committee and other willing volunteers, we have produced a video that will premiere Thursday, June 18. *Life in the Pandemic* was created to help you think

about how best to navigate the many risks involved in returning to work, church, and other activities. I encourage you to watch it on our YouTube.com or Facebook page or on our website.

Also, please note that our Phase II plans are based on current knowledge and the low number of active coronavirus cases in our area at this time. These recommendations are not a guarantee but a set of guidelines that may need to evolve as local conditions change. **They will go into effect this Sunday, June 21**, and include the following:

Loosened distancing rules

- We will decrease the spacing between congregants to 6 to 8 feet.
- Singers or speakers who remove their masks to speak or perform will stay at least 12 feet away from the nearest congregant.
- We will also use small screens to help shield the congregation from performers' exhalations.
- We will run the ventilation in the church at all times.
- We will continue to offer masks at worship services, and ask people to wear them. Masks are key to continuing congregational singing.
- We will encourage handwashing and the use of sanitizer.
- We will refrain from handshakes and other contact during worship.
- Those over the age of 65, and those with underlying health problems, are asked to consider carefully whether a return is advisable in their case. We want you to be safe.
- We will ask those showing visible signs of illness to go home. We love you enough to tell you this so that we can all share fellowship in the future.

Education

- Leaders may resume Sunday morning **adult Bible studies**. They will be asked to remind participants to observe distancing rules.
- **Sunday School for children and youth** will not resume at this time. We will continue to offer web-based children's, youth, and adult lessons after 9:00 worship.
- **The nursery** will not be available during Phase II.
- **Kids' Kirk** will be offered midworship at both services. Leaders and children will follow social distancing guidelines, wear masks, and meet outdoors when weather permits. Children will not gather at the altar during the children's sermon but will leave for their Kids' Kirk location. The following procedures will be observed:

- **Masks:** Masks are strongly encouraged. If children take off their masks, they will be encouraged to put them back on by themselves. Leaders will not touch children's masks to put them back on.
- **Space considerations:** Kids' Kirk will take place outdoors in good weather and in the chapel during inclement weather. The grass or floor will be marked with individual spaces for each child.
- **Hand hygiene:** Participants will use hand sanitizer at the beginning and end of Kids' Kirk.
- **Snacks:** No snacks will be provided, but water will be available in individual disposable cups. Leaders will dispense the water.
- **Temperatures:** Because asymptomatic transmission is common for SARS-COV-2, temperatures will not be routinely taken. Anyone who is feeling unwell should not attend FPC events during this phase.
- **Vacation Bible School** will be held, probably July 12–15, in an online format for three nights and with outdoor family fellowship on the final night.
- **Fun Family Fellowship** may proceed outdoors this summer.
- **Youth events** may proceed outdoors. We recommend that the confirmation retreat and the trip for graduating seniors to Ocoee Retreat Center proceed with safety modifications, since these are predominantly outdoor activities. *As a respiratory safety precaution, FPC will not provide transportation.* Overnight cabin assignments, meal planning, and food preparation for the senior trip will be carefully designed to follow social distancing guidelines and reduce the risk of viral transmission.

Worship

- The 9:00 service will remain both live and livestreamed to accommodate worshipers who need to remain at home.
- Traditional hymns will be prerecorded for replay for the sake of those joining 9:00 worship by livestream.
- The choir will continue to give quartet and/or duet presentations at the 11:00 service.
- Acolytes will not serve during this phase.
- All hymnals and Bibles at the church will be removed. We ask that you bring your own Bible, make use of an electronic Bible, or listen to the readings. We will provide copies of any hymns to be sung.

- The chairs in the fellowship hall will be in spaced rows. In the sanctuary, we will ask people to sit in every other row.
- Signage will remain posted throughout the building, advising people to follow strict social distancing guidelines.
- We will offer prewrapped snacks and sealed bottles of water, but no coffee.
- Offerings will be taken, but we will not pass the collection plates.
- We will not shake hands or touch during the sharing of the peace of Christ. Instead, we will ask people to turn to their neighbors.
- We will observe the Lord's Table on Sunday, July 5, using the "rip-and-dip" cups. The pastors will distribute communion row by row or pew by pew.
- Ushers will come behind the pastors to collect used containers in a lined wastebasket.
- For those nervous about congregational seating, distanced seating in the balcony and at the rear of the sanctuary will be available as a no-singing space.

I know this list seems long, and very, very unnatural when thinking about meeting your family in Christ once again. I wish we didn't have to be concerned about COVID-19, but in reality we do. I believe God would have us balance our desire to return to normal with our obligation to love our neighbor as ourselves. So, again, I ask your patience, and I also ask for your prayers. If we are to have a good path forward, it will be because God has led the way.

Stay strong, and be a blessing,

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel Weddington". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Rev. Samuel Weddington

Pastor