



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OCEAN SPRINGS

FPCOS Church Family,

On Tuesday, March 2, 2021, our governor announced a new executive order related to COVID-19, effectively removing all county mask mandates and lifting restrictions on businesses. This new order came with very encouraging news about COVID-19 numbers and hospitalizations falling dramatically. This news, in addition to the number of Mississippians being vaccinated and the addition of a new, single shot vaccine, should be comforting. Obviously, there are still health risks associated with a very real virus, which should not be taken lightly. But we rejoice in this good report!

Over the last two weeks, we have seen many people return to in-person worship. Many of these people have only been able to join us virtually for the last year. This too is good news! When the governor made his announcement on Tuesday, the session was in a discussion about what to do given our increase in attendance and the freedom many people were feeling to not pre-register for worship or not wear masks.

Many who have had the virus feel that they are not in danger and not a danger to others. Many who have been vaccinated feel the same way. A man in a "vulnerable demographic" was sharing with me yesterday his confidence in the vaccine's ability to protect him from contracting the virus or, at the very least, keep him alive if he does get sick. Still, many are not that confident and remain reasonably cautious and skeptical.

We have heard feedback from more than a few people over the last couple of weeks. Some excited to see so many people on Sunday. Some disappointed that social distancing and mask protocols are not being enforced. The truth is that we are one church that has a multiplicity of convictions about this. As your Session, we are prayerfully and carefully considering how to serve you all best. We would compel you to Christ that for the sake of the name we bear you might consider how to serve others best. May we be a community that rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep.

As things stand today, your session has made the following decisions regarding our two services:

8:30 Service - Restrictions will be lifted. If you have children who need childcare, we will ask you to pre-register them on our website. Masks will not be required. However, if you feel more comfortable wearing a mask, you are encouraged to do so.

11:00 Service - Restrictions will remain. We will limit our seating to 50% capacity, which means we can fit 150 people in that service. You must pre-register to help us comply with this limited capacity. We will set our preregistration number at 130 to accommodate the number of staff and volunteers required for that service. This may mean having to create overflow seating in the Fellowship Hall. Seating will be first-come, first-serve. Masks will not be required for everyone. However, if you would like to sit in a section of the sanctuary with others who prefer to mask, please indicate that when you pre-register and let the deacons know when you arrive and they can seat you in that section. Regardless, social distancing will be practiced by limiting the number of attendees to 50% capacity or less and pew spacing. There will be more directives for entering and exiting to ensure that, even in our congregating, there will be reasonable spacing.

Online Service - We remain committed to serving all and any who wish to worship from home. Streaming both of our services each week and delivering DVDs to those who can't access the internet will continue to be a high priority. If you are not comfortable with either of these "live" worship options, know that your session and pastors are happy to arrange home visits and communion. Please let your shepherd know you'd like some "face time" if you feel the need to stay away until things settle more.



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We understand that many reading this will be frustrated that we are lifting restrictions at our 8:30 service. We understand that many reading this will be frustrated that limits and restrictions will remain in place at our 11:00 service. It is a good thing that we are a diverse family. Please show grace to one another in this time. We may not share the same convictions regarding the best way to worship. However, let us not allow differences in how we worship rob the heart of our worship. We worship a King of grace who is in control of all the things we can't control. To forget this is to open the door to anxiety and anger, which steal our attention and affections for God and neighbor.

At FPCOS our mission is to know Christ and to make Christ known together. Let us make every effort to strive toward these great ends. Let us agree with one another in the Lord.

On behalf of your FPCOS Session,

Grace and Truth,

Pastor Scott