

Cornerstone Church of Skippack

In-Person Worship resumed on Sunday, June 7th

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1. The Mission of Cornerstone Church

- a. Our mission is “To glorify God by making as many people as possible fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.” Meeting in-person is essential to the life of the church. It is vital for the spiritual health of God’s people. Permanent virtual meetings, like online streaming, cannot fully accomplish that mission, although we are glad for the technology that God has been using for His glory.

2. Love of Neighbor

- a. In all of our decisions, including our decision to pause in-person services, a deep sense of responsibility for the common good has been considered. We have prayed and pondered and listened and researched for many weeks prior to this decision.
- b. We will continue offering a digital stream of our service (which will be a ‘live stream’) for those who are at high-risk and/or choose to wait to return. The whole family will continue to worship together.
- c. While lives are at risk in the face of coronavirus, lives are also at stake in many other ways. The ministry of our church is life-sustaining in the midst of these other dangers, and so love compels us to re-open so that we might continue to serve those in need. Now that our region has a thorough understanding of social precautions, we are ready to sensibly re-open.
- d. Additionally, we are made in the image of a communal God (Father, Son, and Spirit.) It is therefore possible that our social shutdown response has caused immeasurable spiritual and emotional damage to many people in our region. Christian ministry, and particularly the in-person nature of our worship, is essential to bringing healing in these areas (see, for instance, this research which shows the connection between church attendance and a lower risk of deaths from drugs, alcohol, and suicide = <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2765488>). Those are called “Deaths From Despair”. Who but the church will commit to serving those at risk to deaths from despair? We will gladly commit to that.
- e. Love of neighbor demands that we safely continue the life-sustaining work of the church.

3. Submission to Government

While Pennsylvania’s government has wisely chosen to not forbid the practice of religion, they have said the following: *“Additionally, nothing in this policy shall be construed to affect the operations of... Religious institutions. However, religious leaders are encouraged to find alternatives to in-person gatherings and to avoid endangering their congregants. Individuals should not gather in religious buildings or homes for services or celebrations until the stay at home order is lifted”.*

In light of this, some would wonder if we are obeying Romans 13:1a (“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.”) A few things should be said here:

- a. At the time of our decision (May 21), our understanding was that we are not prohibited whatsoever from meeting in-person.
- b. At the time of our decision (May 21), our county’s ‘Stay At Home’ order was to terminate on June 4. While not bound to it, we did take this information into serious consideration as we made our decision to re-open on June 7.
- c. We spent significant resources (time, money, energy, research) into building an online format to help people stay at home for the past few months. We certainly – and gladly – honored the Governor’s encouragement to “find alternatives to in-person gatherings.” And in God’s goodness, we will be able to continue to offer these services online for those who are unable to attend.
- d. As we understand it, the governing authority we are subject to is not (in our context) the whim of the current person in office, but rather the PA Constitution (and by extension, the US Constitution). Nothing in our PA Constitution would suggest that a church service could be kept closed by a government authority. The opposite is literally the case in [Article 1.3 Religious Freedom] =
 - i. “All men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences; no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry against his consent; no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience, and no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious establishments or modes of worship.”
- e. Therefore, had the Governor/President demanded that churches stay closed, or if our Governor/President chooses to do so in the future, that order would itself be in opposition to the principle in Romans 13:1a. The Apostle Paul, who wrote Romans 13, is the same one who challenges unlawful government actions (as in, for example, Acts 16:35-40 and Acts 22:22-29.)
- f. Given the above factors, all decisions to open or close a service, meeting, or church event, are strictly limited to the church’s discretion. This accords with Romans 13:1a.

4. Wisdom, Safety, & Flexibility

As it currently stands, in-person worship can be conducted with sensible precautions in place. However, the Lord is sovereign, and this crisis may change dramatically in weeks or even days. These decisions are to be considered temporary, and we may change them as needed going forward. Wisdom and safety guidelines have been sourced from a number of experts, and the following will be our initial plan:

- a. Sanitization
 - i. Our sexton has been professionally trained, via a 2.5-hour training Webinar, specifically in Covid-19 Disinfecting. The facility will be properly cleaned each week.
- b. Attendance
 - i. Many will choose to sit a certain distance from other families, and our main worship room provides more than enough space to facilitate this.
 - ii. We plan to simulcast the service so that those who choose to stay home may continue to worship with us.

iii. We arranged the seats to help people honor social distancing recommendations.

c. Mitigation

- i. Any person who has had any contact with known COVID-19 confirmed cases or who has flu symptoms or fever are advised to stay home and self-quarantine.
- ii. High-risk individuals may want to not attend the in-person service.
- iii. Hand sanitizer will be available for use throughout the facility.
- iv. Families are encouraged to sit together.
- v. Some doors will be propped open or held open by ushers.
- vi. Water fountains are disabled, but we will provide water bottles.
- vii. As we re-gather, we will start out by doing some things in a touchless way, such as celebrating the Lord's Supper and collecting offerings.
- viii. We have enabled online giving.
- ix. Children's ministry events will begin to launch at a later date.

5. Mutual Love

Finally, we must stress an essential point. God's people must have a spirit of love.

We would all be wise to spend serious time studying Romans 14. The enemy of God's people would love for us to fight over this. Temptations to judge will be frequent. Some will come and have no fear of personal contact. Some will, for any number of reasons, not return at all in 2020. Some will come slowly and cautiously, not sure about how they feel. Some will wear masks, and some will not. Someone might even sneeze. But we believe the gospel will be able to hold us together.

So what is a Christian to do, with a church family that has different opinions on this?

Answer: we will choose to love all, in the name of Jesus.

Thanks be to God for the gift of grace through Christ, which enables His people to come together and worship him with one voice!