



FRIENDSHIP

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

small church | BIG MISSION

May 19, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we prepare to re-open our doors for in-person worship for the first time in over 14 months, we stand at the beginning of a new chapter in our history, and it is our joy to be a part of the new thing that God is doing here at Friendship, and – through us and others – in our community!

But just as God gave us hearts and souls to celebrate, God also gave us minds to discern the times and to make choices based on sound judgment. We are proceeding with in-person worship in a cautious way. While we all wish that everything could just go back to “normal” right away – it can’t, at least not yet.

We all know by now of the most recent COVID guidance released by the CDC regarding vaccinated people and masking. While it was certainly a message that we all have desired to hear, it unfortunately has also muddied the waters with a high likelihood of unintended consequences and left many of us confused, especially given the uncomfortably high number of those who, for a variety of reasons, remain unvaccinated.

It is therefore the consensus view of Friendship’s Session that for the time being we observe these sensible precautions in the face of uncertainties which still linger:

- **We ask you to wear a mask when inside the Sanctuary for worship.** Masks will be available at the front door if you don’t have one. **We will also seek to maintain appropriate social distancing.** Every other row of pews will be “roped off” so as to facilitate this easily.
- **We will enjoy beautiful music in worship, though *for now* we will hold back on congregational singing.** This is something that we especially hope we can change soon.
- **At the end of worship, we encourage you to visit and enjoy each other’s company, but preferably outside.** Our ushers will dismiss us by rows, starting from the back, to make this easier.

We will of course re-visit these guidelines often and make revisions as new information comes to light.

We know that there remains a wide range of opinions out there concerning how far safety protocols should go, or even if they are still necessary. Our leadership is guided by our respect for science and public health officials, as well as the recommendations of the COVID Task Force of Northeast Georgia Presbytery which relies heavily on their input.

But just as we are guided by facts and data, we are equally guided by our *values* – by our commitment to helping everyone feel safe in coming to worship God in the company of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Wearing a mask inside, whether you personally feel it necessary or not, is a simple way of expressing love for your neighbor.

Observing these simple guidelines will get us all through to a time, hopefully soon, when such are no longer needed. We’ve all been through a lot in the last 14 months. Let us be gentle and kind and patient with one another as we navigate these waters.

Looking forward to seeing you in worship on the 23rd!

Grateful to be on the Journey with You,
Tom Buchanan
Pastor

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