

RE-OPENING TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

March 30, 2021

First Presbyterian Church – Gainesville, GA

After careful consideration, the FPC Reopening Task Force recommends the following changes to our current guidelines for gathering together as we continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Worship leaders (Lee, Shon, Margaret) are now free to remove their masks while speaking in worship, though they may choose to keep them on as circumstances warrant.** *Rationale: The Task Force recognizes that all three worship leaders are now fully vaccinated, and typically maintain a physical distance that is much greater than the recommended six feet while leading worship. Worship leaders removing their masks to speak in worship is considered very low-risk to those gathered in either Swetenburg Hall or the Sanctuary. Singers will still be required to wear masks.*
- **Printed bulletins, pew/seat Bibles, and hymnals may now be provided at both services.** *Rationale: The likelihood of transmission of the Covid-19 virus via hard surfaces such as printed materials is low, especially if these materials are not handed from person to person. Transmission generally occurs via airborne particles. Hand sanitizer is provided for all who attend worship.*
- **Bus service will resume to local assisted living communities for worship only (not Sunday School at this time).** *Rationale: All assisted living communities included in our bus service have assured us that their communities are now 100% vaccinated. In addition, recent CDC guidelines for fully vaccinated people allow for gatherings in small groups. Anyone riding the bus will be expected to wear their masks and maintain physical distance if possible.*
- **Front desk volunteers will be allowed to resume working in the church office provided that they are fully vaccinated.** *Rationale: Our FPC church staff are stretched thin, and need the assistance of volunteers. Church staff members have their own office areas, and distance can still be maintained even with a front desk volunteer. Volunteers would be expected to wear masks while working at the church.*

The Task Force recommends that other current protocols remain unchanged, including:

- Anyone gathering on church grounds will observe proper physical distancing (maintaining at least 6' between individuals) and will wear a mask. Hand sanitizing stations will also remain at church entrances for all who enter.
- Groups outside the membership of the church shall not be allowed at this time.
- Groups will schedule gatherings at least a week in advance by contacting Debbie Holcombe, Church Administrator.
- No food or drink will be allowed at any indoor gatherings at this time.

The Task Force has approved and recommends a motion from the church staff to have a time of singing outside (distanced, masked) on Easter Sunday. Songs will be led by music staff after each service, and the benediction will then occur outside.

Other considerations of the Task Force:

- The Task Force has spent considerable time discussing the resumption of in-person Sunday School classes. At least one Sunday School class has reported that all usual attendees are fully vaccinated. The Task Force is not recommending the resumption of in-person Sunday School classes at this time, recommending instead that we wait a bit longer until more adults can be vaccinated. *Rationale: Currently, our facilities staff has identified occupancy limits (taking into account a physical distance of at least six feet between persons in the space) for all areas of the church. There are two FPC Sunday School classes whose rosters are greater than these occupancy limits. Other Sunday School classes' rosters can be accommodated in their usual meeting space. The Task Force recognizes the importance of these small group gatherings and wants them to resume. However, it is assumed that Sunday School classes may have visitors or attendees from other classes (particularly classes above their occupancy limits who cannot meet), possibly putting the classes above their occupancy limits for their usual space. Furthermore, the Task Force is generally in favor of re-opening plans that are more communal rather than applying only to particular groups within the church. It is our hope that the resumption of in-person Sunday School gatherings can be recommended in the weeks to come as more adults are vaccinated, and as CDC guidelines for vaccinated people change (perhaps allowing for less physical distance between people gathering).*
- The Task Force has also spent considerable time discussing the resumption of corporate (congregational) singing in worship. We all recognize how difficult it has been to refrain from singing in worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines are offering hope that we will be able to resume singing in the near future. However, at this time the Task Force is not recommending that we resume congregational singing at this time, recommending instead that we wait a bit longer until more adults can be vaccinated. *Rationale: Group singing continues to be identified as a high-risk behavior for transmitting the COVID-19 virus. Even when masks are worn and physical distance of six feet is maintained, there is still a possibility for transmission. The rise of more contagious and more lethal COVID-19 variants is concerning, and there is no clear consensus regarding efficacy of existing vaccines against all new variants. It's clear that we all want to avoid a situation in which one of these more contagious variants spreads widely even among vaccinated people, necessitating further shutdowns. Until more adults are vaccinated and better data is available regarding efficacy of existing vaccines against COVID variants, congregational singing is not advised.*
- The FPC Session has directed the Task Force to formulate a plan for the resumption of K-12 Sunday School classes, taking into consideration current guidelines for K-12 in-person learning in local schools. The Task Force will be taking up this issue as a priority in the coming weeks.

Prayerfully submitted to the Session for consideration and approval on March 30, 2021 by the FPC Re-opening Task Force: Rev. Lee Koontz, Rev. Shon Peppers, Rev. Margaret Turney-Ayer, Rev. Dallas Thompson, Debbie Holcomb, Susan Moon, Thomas Peppers, Alene Arenas, Joe Biddy, Stacy Morley, Jack Spencer, Don Willers

Recommendations of the Task Force were approved by the Session on March 30, 2021. Feedback from the Session was given to the Task Force regarding "Other Considerations". The Task Force will continue to meet and lead our discussions on re-opening phases.

Rev. Lee Koontz, Moderator of Session
Tracy Lees-Grant, Clerk of Session