

June 4th, 2020

Dear Church Family,

As we make plans to re-open the church for indoor worship, you will no doubt understand that there are risks entailed. Not just physical health, but the spiritual health of our church. The subject of public/private safety and public/private freedom has become a huge point of contention in society at large, and these debates naturally filter into the church. Complicating matters is the difficult to understand, sometimes conflicting recommendations and scientific data available to make good decisions. The spiritual danger this poses for the church is as the stakes get higher, we lose sight of the Biblical commands and values we ought to uphold as the redeemed people of God.

As the session has met numerous times, we've had some values we have come back to help shape policy:

- 1) **Caring for others, especially the most vulnerable.** As elders (and, by extension, all of us) are to care for the flock and look to others' good (1Cor 10:24 *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor*). It is honoring to the Lord that we take reasonable measures for the safety of others.
- 2) **Church Unity.** We are all called by one name, the Lord Jesus Christ, out of our sin and into eternal life, and this fact means that we, as the Church, are linked together (John 17:11 "*that they may be one, even as we are one*"). Divisions and dissensions are a product of the flesh (Gal 5:20) and not the fruit of the Spirit. We are to mutually submit to one another out of love and reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21), putting our own agendas aside to serve one another. How do we fight divisions? What follows is the next value:
- 3) **Christian Liberty.** Christian liberty means that we are bound by God, and not by the commands of man, in our conscience. Paul writes to the Romans (Chps. 14-15) about 'stronger' and 'weaker' brothers who are judging each other over matters that are 'indifferent' or 'opinions' (Rom 14:1). That doesn't mean that opinions can't have wisdom, logic, evidence, but they just aren't at the same level as Scripture. Charity, grace, restraint from judgment until evidence is in, reflecting on Scripture is something we ought to extend to one another in the body of Christ. We also ought not to establish as law (or equal to God's law) something that is even a good and wise idea, or personal conviction.
- 4) **Continue Our Mission** (*we are a family of God; preaching, equipping, engaging*). Throughout this process, whether we are live stream only or full indoor service, we will continue to preach the gospel, build each other up, and engage the world (2 Tim 4:2) no matter what come our way. This is our duty and no pandemic, government, or culture can compel us to do otherwise.

Out of these values, as passed by the session on June 3rd, 2020 (which may be updated as circumstances require), we the session institute the following policies:

1. We will have an outdoor service for JUNE 7, 2020, and begin indoor services on JUNE 14, 2020. This gives enough time to properly plan for the indoor service.
2. **There is no requirement for masks/face coverings, but we highly recommend masks wearing (see below under 'questions').**
3. Seating will be changed to promote physical distancing
4. Communion and bulletins will be distributed in a way to minimize contact

5. Exterior doors will be open to allow extra ventilation in the Sanctuary area
6. We encourage fellowship (if possible) to take place outside the church rather than inside
7. An FM transmitter (when obtained) will transmit sound of the service to the parking lot to allow the possibility of people to listen and visit outdoors later
8. We will continue live stream services indefinitely for those who elect to stay home
9. We strongly urge the sick to stay home or remove themselves if they feel ill during the service
10. We will not use name tags
11. We will have a box for offering as well as still accept offerings via mail (PO Box 4025, Mooresville NC 281117)
12. We will not have greeters
13. The classrooms, the stairwell, and other parts of either building will be closed (*unless otherwise notified). The nursery will be open as an overflow area for parents if necessary
14. We will work to have hand sanitizer stations available
15. We may change these policies if there is a major spike in cases in Iredell county OR if someone has alerted the church that they have come down with it and they were in a service. We will protect anonymity of those who are sick unless given permission.

QUESTIONS:

As you look at the various policies and plans going into effect, we'd like to answer a few questions you may have about the policies we are putting in place:

- **WHY START INDOOR SERVICES?** On a practical level, outdoor services have their own dangers as the heat of summer hits. Indoor services are the best way for us to gather regardless of the weather. However, we will continue our live streams indefinitely, and we hope soon to also have an FM transmitter which will allow sound from the service to be heard anywhere there is a radio (within 0.5mi), so there is the option if people would like to listen in the parking lot and fellowship afterwards. There are no perfect options at this time, and we grieve that we cannot have one option that fits everyone.
- **WHAT ABOUT MASKS?** The best science available to us is that masks have some (but not all) effects at stopping the transmission of this disease¹. In addition, most masks (cloth, not the surgical/N95 grade masks) are MOST effective at keeping an individual who is infected (and may not know it) from spreading the disease, and LESS effective at keeping an individual from getting infected (i.e. it's more for protecting other people than protecting yourself, while it does have some benefit). Therefore, the session **strongly recommends** that you wear some kind of facial covering while interacting with others, especially inside where the viral load can be greater. This is a way for us to care for others, not so much about ourselves.
- **WHY WE DIDN'T MAKE MASKS A REQUIREMENT?** In the interest of Christian liberty, the session would rather ask and let each individuals search their hearts and consciences about what they ought to do rather than us, as elders, command something that may violate someone's conscience who truly feels they would be dishonoring the Lord if they wore a mask. By strongly recommending, we felt this was the best way to both give our opinion and yet leave freedom of conscience.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31142-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext). Accessed 6/3/2020

- **WHAT IF SOME WEAR MASKS BUT OTHERS DON'T?** It is important that we do not pass judgment on someone's spiritual state based upon whether they wear a mask or not. This can lead to divisions and spiritual pride. We ought not to judge (without evidence) those who wear masks as being somehow unrighteously afraid, and we ought not to judge (without evidence) those who don't wear masks as being careless with lives. Who knows? Some may well be and need to confess, but we ought not to give in to presumption. We cannot allow ourselves to be divided as a church or fragment into factions. We have to live out costly grace among ourselves.
- **WHAT IF SOMEONE, WHO WAS AT CHURCH, GOT COVID?** We pledge to protect the information about medical conditions of anyone unless they have given us permission (that has been a general rule, as a protection both for that person's good and for legal/liability reasons). That includes keeping anonymous anyone who is infected. However, if we (the session) are alerted to possible exposure, we may need to assess change our policies in the short term to accommodate our services to minimize further exposure.
- **WHAT IF I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THESE DECISIONS?** You're in good company! As a session we grieve the fact that there is just no good way to care for everyone equally in the way we would like to, and hate having to make hard decisions that will affect people negatively or force them to make hard decisions. We are happy to hear what you have to say and we will do what we can to help you or your family. Bear with us as we are prayerfully seeking wisdom and guidance from the Lord to tend the sheep.

We leave you with this word, and please be in prayer for the church as we strive to continue our mission in these trying times:

Eph 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, (21) to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

In Him

The Session of Harbor Church