

September 21, 2020

Dear Westminster Family and Friends,

This greeting comes to you from Westminster's Task Force on Campus Use. Thank you for your concern and prayers during the last several months. We have collectively been working to discern, in the midst of a global pandemic, how best to serve and safely support our congregation in these challenging times. Our hope is this missive will help shed some light on our intent, decision criteria and recommendations.

From the very beginning, our mission has been to determine **when** and, very importantly, **how** we can safely return to in-person activities on Westminster's campus. In the time of a public health crisis - this is a serious goal – with serious implications. As evidenced, across the globe, COVID19 is a dangerous virus that is easily transmitted. Consequently, our top priorities in our discussions and deliberations have been three-fold:

1. Safety for all, particularly – our most vulnerable and at-risk members and staff
2. Ability to ensure that necessary safety protocols and standards can be effectively administered
3. Recognition that the need for Christian community is deep-rooted and desired by our membership

Many may have wondered about our input and criteria for making recommendations. Since May, when we first gathered, we have utilized many resources, including but not limited to information from state and local health departments; state government and CDC guidelines; Donegal Presbytery recommendations for campus use; information from multiple churches both local and in other parts of the country; the planning efforts of local school districts (most notably West Chester) and PCUSA guidelines. We have read numerous articles and studies conducted on the virus, and we have also monitored local infectivity rates which remain at levels that would not indicate it is safe to return to normal activities at this juncture. Additionally, we have looked at facility and capacity plans for the building which under current COVID19 guidelines are very limiting in terms of worship attendance. Capacity with social distancing protocols in place allow for only 80 – 90 in the sanctuary in total.

In consideration of all of the above, our recommendations for moving forward have been to intentionally proceed with caution, follow public health guidelines and protocols and make slow but steady progress toward expanding the use of the Westminster campus. This gradual approach has enabled us to consider some smaller and controlled group gatherings and essentially “test the waters”. Over the summer, our pastors were able to conduct weddings and funerals of groups less than 25. The first attempt at a larger in-person, outdoor gathering was conducted on Sunday 9/13 with positive feedback reported from both the participants and the staff.

On Tuesday, 9/15, after thoughtful discussion and prayer, we submitted to Session a series of recommendations to make further progress in expanding facility use and worship. The following recommendations were approved by Session.

1. Hold a second outdoor service on Sunday, September 27th
2. Allow WPC groups of up to 15 to meet in Spellman Hall. Staff members will need to be present if the meeting is not held during hours when staff are regularly in the building. Access to the meeting must be made available virtually for anyone who is unable or unwilling to attend in person.
3. Wednesday morning in-person prayer service can be held in the sanctuary with a maximum of 25 people in attendance from 9:10 – 9:30.
4. The sanctuary and labyrinth will be available for private, individual prayer and worship during limited times.
5. Taizé in-person services may be held in the sanctuary with a maximum of 25 people in attendance.

All these gatherings will require registration, attendance forms, waivers, etc. – and will also require strict adherence to COVID19 safety protocols. Scheduling of the events listed above will also be dependent upon any changes to the guidelines issued by either state or local officials. These will begin the week of September 27.

As a task force we will continue to work with church leadership to evaluate the response to the programs listed above – as well as adherence to safety guidelines. The health, welfare and vitality of the congregation remain our utmost concern as we look at future campus use expansion options and we covet your prayers as we do so. We do not expect to open Sunday morning worship for in-person attendance until after the state guidelines recommend more than 25 persons for mass gatherings.

Throughout these long difficult months of dealing with a world-wide pandemic, the leadership and staff of Westminster have provided meaningful and creative ways of being together in both community and worship while apart physically. We have seen increased attendance during all worship services, including Sunday morning and Wednesday chapel. We have experienced Vacation Bible School, concerts, Taizé worship, Journey classes and even a youth cabaret remotely. Under the leadership of Session, our committees have found ways to continue their work and we even held an incredibly successful virtual 5K. Our Westminster leaders and staff are to be commended for their fine work in helping us to still “be the church” in this world. It is our prayer that we will continue to do so as we strive to offer a welcoming sacred, yet safe space for ALL of our members.

Be safe, be healthy and God bless you all,

Humbly submitted,

The Task Force On Campus Use:

Steve Brown
Karen Finley
Don Lincoln
Scott Lockledge

Gerry McShane
Jim Scanlon
Steve Simonson
Barbara Sivek