

A Return to In-Person Worship – Birch Presbyterian Church

After much prayer and discussion, our Session has decided that we will return to in-person worship on _____. We take seriously the church's calling to gather together, and the work of spiritual formation that happens when we do. But we also take seriously our calling to love our neighbors and to protect and welcome the least and the most vulnerable among us. So in order to lessen the risks for everybody involved, things will look a little different when we return.

- We will be limiting the number of people allowed in the Sanctuary to 50.
- We're asking that everybody wear a mask (except for children 2 and under, people who cannot physically remove one, or anybody with difficulty breathing for whom a mask could be a harm rather than a help). If you do not already have a mask, we will provide a disposable one for you at the door.
- We'll have increased sanitation practices, including hand sanitizing stations at the entrances and exits. We'll be closing one set of restrooms and asking people to use sanitizing wipes (which will be made available to you) on the faucet/door handles if anybody needs to use the restroom on Sunday mornings. We'll also be propping open the south doors of the building throughout the morning for increased ventilation and to avoid the touching of door handles.
- We're asking that everybody stay at least 6 feet apart throughout the service, and we will have certain pews/sections of pews roped off to encourage social distancing.
- There won't be any fellowship/coffee time before or after the service, and pews will be dismissed row by row (like at a wedding) as we leave.
- There will be no nursery or Sunday school for this initial phase of our return.
- In worship there will be no congregational singing (as singing can cause air particles to escape through masks) but we will find some way to incorporate music and perhaps solo performances as well. We will also be removing hymnals for the time being to avoid multiple people touching the same one, and to provide one less thing to sanitize each week.
- Finally we will also try to avoid the use of bulletins, but if we can't, then they will be handed out by a volunteer who is wearing a mask and gloves, and there will be no passing of plates for either communion or offering (if you'd like to give to the church you can continue to do so by mailing checks or giving online, otherwise the offering plates will be placed at the back of the sanctuary so that people can give on their way out).

To some, this may seem like an over-reaction, but these are the steps we feel necessary to keep our congregation and our community healthy in this current moment. And we must remember that these changes are temporary and will not last forever. Even so, we recognize that with or without all these changes, some people will choose to stay home and err on the side of caution. And we want you to know that staying home is a choice that we will respect, and a choice that should not lead to any feelings of guilt or shame. So, in order to welcome those who stay home, and in order to keep the whole congregation connected, we will continue to provide some form of online worship even after our return to in-person services.

Until we gather in person, we will continue to worship as we have these past couple months, and we want to say thank you to everybody who prayed for our Session in the lead up to these decisions. We truly believe those prayers mattered, and if anything changes with our plan, we will be sure to notify you right away. As always, if you have any questions, concerns, or needs that we can help you with, please reach out to one of your pastors or elders, otherwise we will be praying for you until we can see you in-person again.

May God bless you and keep you until then and always,
Pastor and the Session