

LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD – FROM PASTOR LAWRENCE

On Sunday mornings just before I greet you at the beginning of worship, I picture you in the sanctuary. I envision you with whom and where you customarily settle for our time of praise and prayer, hearing and responding to the Word. I imagine looking back through the open narthex doors to greeters who welcome and connect with first time visitors.

As you join us for the livestream of worship, perhaps you also imagine those beside you, in front of and behind you, as if you were worshipping with us in the sanctuary.

With you in my mind's eye, I'm then ready to step into the frame of the worship livestream and greet you with the words – *“May the Lord Be With You...”*

It is so right and good to recall the “sweet, sweet spirit” of worship! AND it is so right and good to begin prayerfully planning how we may gather together again for worship and fellowship, learning and serving!

Already, you may have heard about our “Phased Opening of Oxford Presbyterian Church.” I'm so grateful for all the dedication and time of our Ruling Elders and Trustees, staff and health professionals invested in this living plan. We drew on the latest guidelines from the CDC, State of Ohio, Butler County as well as input from the Presbytery of the Miami Valley.

The plan outlines the following gracious and gradual approach to active ministry once again:

- In **Phase One** the church office will be actively staffed with recommended safety protocols. Worship will be via the livestream only.
- In **Phase Two** worship will return to the Memorial Church sanctuary with recommended safety protocols. Worship will also continue via the livestream.
- In **Phase Three** fellowship, learning as well as serving will resume and grow with appropriate safety measures in place. Worship will also continue via the livestream.

With these three phases in mind, I'll fill in several of the most significant details.

In **Phases One and Two**, upon arriving at church, all staff and visitors will take a health assessment.

- Everyone will be asked - Do you have a cough or flu-like symptoms?
- With infrared thermometers, one's temperature will be taken.
- Everyone will wash or sanitize their hands.

- Social distancing will be maintained.
- Masks will be worn. The church will provide a mask if needed.

Additional **Phase Two** health precautions for worship include:

- Capacity of the Memorial Church Sanctuary limited to 58 on the main floor to maintain social distancing.
- Greeting through any touch before, during or after worship will be expressly discouraged.
- Ushers will guide worshippers to and from the pews.
- Masks will be worn by everyone including worship leaders except when a worship leader is called upon to lead a primary function of the service.
- If communion is celebrated, All-in-One Communion Cups will be used.
- Offering plates will be available at collection stations before and after worship.
- The Sanctuary Choir will not sing.
- There will be no Fellowship Hour following worship.

While appropriate safety measures will continue in **Phase Three**, there will be no limit to the capacity of the sanctuary. Masks will be discretionary. The Sanctuary Choir will return and all will be welcomed to savor our time of fellowship after worship.

This time of social distancing revealed even more to us about new avenues of connection. We will continue our worship livestream for the foreseeable future. With planned upgrades to our equipment and technology already in process before the pandemic, we trust that digital improvements will create more meaningful connections and expand our mission.

While many have found comfort and community through the power of connecting to our worship livestream and times of morning prayer, this time of social distancing has also revealed its limitations to others. We are actively engaged in helping anyone overcome the digital divide. If you would like assistance, or know of any who would like assistance, in any way please reach out to me or our church office and we will connect with you.

In the coming weeks, we'll be in active communication via email, social media and the telephone to share additional information on each of these phases. You will also be asked for specific feedback to assist our Session and Trustees such as communicating your potential worship attendance. Be sure to visit our church website for the latest information.

Our commitment to you is to create the safest and most gracious opportunities for us to gather as the body of Christ once again. So that when I greet you with the words *The Lord Be with You...* you may respond boldly *And also with you!*

