

Returning to Corporate Worship

From the Leading Elders of Jerusalem Church

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

UPDATES

As our circumstances related to the COVID-19 global pandemic continue to change, the Leading Elders reassess our plan for public corporate worship *weekly* and continue to prayerfully consider what is best for *our congregation*. For ease of reference, as you glance over the updated plan you will notice the changes in two simple ways: (1) strikethrough of the old section and (2) updated section in red.

INTRODUCTION

During this COVID-19 pandemic, the Leading Elders have attempted to make decisions with two big principles in mind: *love God and love neighbor*. Wisely applying these two great commandments during the COVID-19 circumstances has not been simple or easy. The Leading Elders desire to glorify our God,¹ uphold the essentiality of corporate worship and God's means of grace,² feed Christ's sheep the Word for their spiritual edification,³ shepherd and pray for the sheep as we can,⁴ respect and promote the value of human life,⁵ and "honor the emperor."⁶

Since COVID-19 broke out in PA, churches in the commonwealth have never been commanded under law to close. Only recommendations and advice were given. As a church, we are considered "essential" or "life-sustaining" by the state,⁷ therefore returning to public corporate is not an act of civil disobedience.

WHAT WERE OUR REASONS FOR CLOSING?

Human beings are body and soul. We are called in Scripture to care for both. The Lord's Prayer addresses both. *The primary reason for the Leading Elders' free and voluntary cancelation of public corporate worship was that we believed cancelling would show maximum love for neighbor (honor human life), both to our congregation and community.* In order to show maximum love in an unprecedented time, the following considerations were involved in canceling:

- COVID-19 was a *global* pandemic and threat
- Society had not built up an immunity to COVID-19 like it had with influenza
- We didn't know much about COVID-19 and its potential impact

¹ 1 Cor. 10:31

² Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25

³ Deut. 6:4-9; Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Tim. 4:2

⁴ 1 Pet. 5:2-4; Acts 20:28

⁵ Gen. 1:26-27

⁶ 1 Pet. 2:17; Rom. 13

⁷ <https://www.scribd.com/document/452553026/UPDATED-8-45pm-May-11-2020-Industry-Operation-Guidance>

- Overloading local hospitals was a real and considerable threat
- COVID-19 was spreading rapidly in PA and the statistics appeared very serious
- Government was suggesting/advising churches not to meet (never mandating)
- Many churches were closing

WHAT ARE OUR REASONS FOR OPENING?

*After much prayer, research, and discussion, the Leading Elders have decided to return to public worship on **Sunday, May 31**.*

The first four commandments of the Ten Commandments detailing how we love God are *most important*. The last six on how to love our neighbor flow out of the first four. God commands His people to meet for public worship. Public worship is an act of love, gratitude, and obedience and only under extreme and rare circumstances should it be delayed (e.g. Bubonic Plague). Abstaining from corporate public worship is an undesirable prudential response for these unique times in order to show love to neighbor, including proper regard for human life.⁸ That said, emotional and spiritual threats and consequences of quarantine and not having worship must be carefully considered alongside the physical threats and consequences of the reasons for cancelling. In light of these general principles, below are several specific factors involved in our decision to resume public corporate worship services:

- Churches were *never* commanded by law to close (closures were voluntary)
- The posture of the Leading Elders has always been to return to worship as soon as possible to honor the first four commandments of God's law
- Hospitals are now equipped to handle more than the incoming COVID-19 cases
- Business like Home Depot, Paul B's, and beer distributors have been considered "life-sustaining" and welcome in many customers in a week; we believe that the Church is essential, who through the ministry of the gospel of Christ affords our only comfort in life and in death
- Notification of our intent to return to public corporate worship on May 31 has been sent to Northern Lancaster County Regional Police Department.
- Many medical professionals believe it is safe to return to normal activities with prudent precautions (e.g. CDC, HHS, etc.)
- Churches have returned to public worship or are planning to return in May/ June
- People from Jerusalem Church have expressed their desire to return and are comfortable to return to public corporate worship without fear of contraction
- The plan outlined below is a *prudent* and *possible* plan which displays much love for neighbor, shows respect/honor to both the government and attendees, and even includes those who are not comfortable yet to attend

As we move ahead to resume corporate worship, we hope to prioritize "love God" and apply "love neighbor" prudently as it flows out of loving God.

⁸ Matthew 3:1-6

The following plan is an attempt to get us back to public corporate worship for the spiritual strength and growth of the saints as soon as possible while implementing prudent guidelines which continue to advocate love for neighbor and showing wisdom and love to those with varying opinions and responses.

We recognize that not everyone has the same comfort level in returning nor the same comfort level with certain practices when returning. With that in mind, the Leading Elders are allowing time for people to adjust and return as they are able by providing livestream video as an option.

IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE RETURNING

People have different thoughts, opinions, responses, etc. about our current circumstances. We are striving to show love to all. If you are uncomfortable with any of the details of this plan, we encourage you to stay home and join us via livestream. The elders intently desire for you to repeatedly hear and respond to the gospel. These livestreams are an important way, during the pandemic, that you are provided with messages centered around the Law and Gospel, all for your comfort in Christ.

Livestream on Youtube.com will be available for a limited time to include those less comfortable about returning to public corporate worship. We desire people to feel safe and confident when returning.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF RETURNING

It is unavoidable - *it will be quite different returning and that is emotional and somewhat disappointing.* Our public gathering will not be like it had been before COVID-19. We hope that isn't the case for long, however we need to be emotionally prepared for the changes. Seeing masks evokes certain emotions. Having to ~~remain 8 feet from~~ **practice sensible social distancing with** people we love and desire to be close to, shaking hands, hugging, ~~conversing,~~ etc. evokes certain emotions. Even though it may be emotional, and even though there will be **a certain** disappointment, we must consider the blessing in being able to be together again even with the changes. **To seek to alleviate some of the emotional impact, before worship, from our seats and without masks, we'll pause for a short time to look around, to see one another's faces, to wave, and to "greet one another" with love from a short distance away.** Take heart dear ones, we are moving in the right direction!

RETURNING TO WORSHIP OUTSIDE @ 1620 NEWPORT ROAD

The Leading Elders have decided that it is most prudent to return to public corporate worship *outside* before eventually moving back *inside*. The reasons for this include:

- We believe that *at this time* an outside plan for worship provides the greatest opportunity for loving our neighbor in view of the fact that there are a variety of comfort levels among the members of Jerusalem Church
- The coronavirus doesn't appear to be spread outdoors when practicing social distancing
- The logistics of an outdoor service are much simpler than an inside service (e.g. registration is not needed for an outdoor service)
- Everyone can be together in one group vs. holding several services of smaller groups
- Singing will be done at an outdoor service (singing would likely *not be done* indoors)

IN ORDER TO BEST LOVE GOD AND LOVE NEIGHBOR FOR MUTUAL EDIFICATION AND THE BOND OF CHARITY AND PEACE (ROM. 14-15; 1 COR. 10) AND TO BEGIN WORSHIPING TOGETHER AGAIN, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE WORK TOGETHER AND SUBMIT TO THE LEADING ELDERS' COUNSEL (HEB. 13:7).

INCLEMENT WEATHER. A decision will be made on Saturday to cancel public corporate worship and move to livestream on Youtube. *An email will be sent out announcing a cancelation and those without email can call the church number (717-665-6565).* No message, come on out!

EVERYONE IS INVITED; COME IF YOU'RE HEALTHY. If you are feeling ill or have symptoms like a cough or temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, please stay home, rest, recuperate, and join our livestream if you are able. If you are healthy, come on out!

SUNDAY SCHOOL IS CANCELED. Sunday School is canceled until further notice.

SOCIAL DISTANCING. ~~While on church property, we ask that you maintain a distance of 8 feet from people not in your household. We desire to go above and beyond to show honor and love.~~ We recognize the difficulty of practicing social distancing; we found it difficult ourselves and did not lead by example on 5.31.20 in abiding by our 8 feet request. Eight feet was likely an unrealistic standard, and we do not want to set guidelines which we cannot or will not follow (We humbly request your forgiveness in this area, and are very much appreciative of your extending grace to us as we continually seek to implement and revise previous recommendations). We ask that you use *good judgment* and practice *sensible social distancing* that shows love and respect to those you're sitting by and talking with. *Please understand that some of our people are physiologically vulnerable, caring for physiologically vulnerable loved ones, or simply more comfortable keeping reasonable distance.*

As you sit with your household, we do suggest that 6-8 feet be maintained from other households (see below under "Arrival Instructions").

WEARING A MASK. Thank you for making a small sacrifice in order to visibly and practically show and express your love to others. It was seen and felt! Thank you for honoring your elders as well. We were pleased with the Christlike and positive spirit we sensed during our time together. The kids did a wonderful job!

Why are we continuing to require masks (just when not sitting down) when they are not required by law? Please carefully consider four simple reasons:

1. To protect the physiologically vulnerable (e.g. older people, those who recently had serious illnesses, those with compromised immune systems, etc.)
2. To protect those who are caring for the physiologically vulnerable (e.g. spouses, parents, etc.)
3. With the previous reasons in mind, wearing masks allows us to get closer *responsibly*, to lessen the distance of social distancing and converse with one another with comfort and freedom.
4. Some from our congregation prefer that masks are worn while not sitting

Please bring your own masks. For those who don't have one or forget theirs, masks will be available. In order to best show charity and peace to all present, masks must be worn on church property with only one exception - *masks may be removed after when sitting down in your lawn chairs 6-8 feet away from others*. When you get up, masks must be worn.

TIME OF WORSHIP SERVICE. Outside Sunday services will begin at 10:15 am.

ARRIVAL INSTRUCTIONS. Please arrive early (between 9:45 am and 10:00 am) so we can park and seat effectively. A team led by the Deacons will help direct you. After parking, people should carry their lawn chairs to an open spot sitting at least 6-8 feet away from others.

Must only those of the *same* household sit together? We ask that you use your own good judgment. Families from *different* households who are in regular contact or friends in regular contact may want to sit together. Please use good judgment and do what you feel is best and most loving to those around you, and try to keep 6-8 feet away from other households while sitting. ~~Households can sit together and do not have to practice social distancing.~~

Special parking is available *upon previous request only* for people who would like to remain in their car to participate. To request special parking either email or call Steph Smith at coffeebean@windstream.net or (717) 305-0987.

SEATING LOCATION. Seating will be available in the parking area to the east in designated spots and in the grassy area near the playground (playground is closed). A team led by the Deacons will help direct you. **Please be mindful of the roped off areas.**

LAWN CHAIRS ARE NEEDED. Please bring your own lawn chairs. Chairs *will not* be provided.

WORSHIP GUIDES. A worship guide will be provided *online* (<https://www.jerusalemchurch.net/resourcesforfamilyworship>) and can be printed out beforehand. This will include any corporate readings and song lyrics. Bulletins will not be provided at the service.

CHILDCARE WILL NOT BE PROVIDED. The nursery is not available until further notice. The playground is closed. ~~Families with young children are welcome to attend and roam in the grass area behind those sitting in chairs during the service while practicing social distancing of 8 feet.~~

BUILDING & BATHROOMS. The church building is closed. Bathrooms on *lower level only* will be open for use (only bathrooms please). Please try to avoid use. Enter through the lower level entrance under the carport. **Please practice reasonable social distancing.** ~~Social distancing of 8 feet is important.~~

OFFERING. You can place your offering in the ~~offering box~~ **red offering bucket** as you exit the **seating area before getting into your vehicle** ~~church parking lot~~. A team led by the Deacons will assist you.

LEADING ELDERS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO TALK. This has been a difficult time for us all. If you would like to talk with a Leading Elder about *anything* they will be available after the service to talk **while practicing reasonable social distancing** ~~at a distance of 8 feet.~~

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS FOR LEADING ELDERS

Perhaps you have questions or comments for the Leading Elders. They want to hear from you. Feel free to contact any of them.