

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Psalm 122:1

It has been more than three months since we have been able to gather in our sanctuary for worship together. Our hopes for reopening our building have swung with varying predictions from experts and with evolving learning about COVID-19 infections. Not long ago, recommendations suggested that reopening of worship services would most likely be allowed in Phase 4, later on in the summer. Recently, Governor Cuomo announced that religious services will be allowed to resume with restrictions during Phase 2, which for the Mid-Hudson area has just begun. While it is very encouraging that the State's phases of reopening are being reached even earlier than at first predicted, many questions remain. For example, public health experts are very concerned about when (more likely than if) a second wave will hit our area.

A reopening task force was established by the Session to deliberate carefully regarding the most prudent course going forward for Rye Presbyterian Church. It has studied recommendations and guidelines from the NYS Department of Health, the CDC, and Presbytery. The task force has outlined several procedural steps to aid in our reopening. The guiding principle of the task force has been to ensure the health and safety of our congregants and of our leadership.

Our live stream services are going well, and we feel that being cautious is prudent, especially with so many in our congregation having one or more COVID-19 risk factors. At the same time, we recognize that many are eager to return to gathering together in person in our lovely church building if that can be done safely. Church areas have been thoroughly disinfected and sanitized. With ongoing diligent care to follow cleaning and other recommendations, reopening should be minimally risky to many people.

If the metrics for our area continue to be satisfied, the task force has recommended that we experiment with first steps at having some people allowed into our church for 10 o'clock worship on June 28. Note that we will continue to live stream our services even when we return to worshipping in person.

The following are procedures we will use as we reopen the sanctuary for worship:

1. Worship attendance is limited to 25% of capacity. For our sanctuary, that is approximately 100 people.
2. We will be using a reservation system for worship. The link will be sent out via email. You *must* register to attend worship each week so that we can maintain the mandated attendance limits. You will be asked your family name, and how many from your family will be attending. If the service registration fills to capacity, your name will be placed on a waiting list, with notifications sent out if a space opens up.
3. We request that you attend only if you are healthy, are showing no signs or symptoms of illness, and have not had any known exposure to COVID-19 in the preceding two weeks. If you have any symptoms, *please stay home*. You can still watch the worship via YouTube or Zoom.
4. If you are in a high risk group due to health issues or age (over 65), the current recommendation is to continue to stay home. Please consider asking your doctor how prudent it is for you to attend worship in person at this point in time.

5. Since it may take more time than usual to get everyone in place, we ask that you plan to arrive around 9:50 a.m.
6. You *must* wear a mask at all times during the service. You are encouraged to bring your own, though we will have a limited supply of adult-sized masks if you should forget yours.
7. You will be asked to use hand sanitizer before entering the sanctuary.
8. For entry into the church everyone will use the main sanctuary doors facing the Post Road. Ushers will be there to greet you, confirm your good health, and help you find a seat safely distanced from other congregants, filling the available pews from front to back.
9. There will be no child care or Sunday School, but children are welcome to sit with their families during worship. We will provide coloring pages and illustrated children's bulletins that will be connected to each Sunday's scriptures. We ask that families bring their own crayons or colored pencils for their children to use during worship. It might also be helpful to bring a hard surface (a book or clipboard) for them to use while coloring.
10. For a time, worship will look and sound different.
 - a. Upon entering the sanctuary, you will be asked to check in and then shown where to sit. You will not be able to simply choose your "usual" pew. Families will be able to sit together.
 - b. Pews will be marked off to maintain social distancing.
 - c. To increase air circulation, while the AC will be running, we will also have windows open. Please feel free to dress comfortably.
 - d. There will be no use of bibles or hymnals, which have been removed from the sanctuary.
 - e. Bulletins will be preplaced on usable pew seats.
 - f. There will be no congregational singing of the hymns. Hymns will still be included in the service and may be sung by those worshipping from home via our live stream broadcast.
 - g. There will be no physical contact with those outside family groups, such as handshakes, elbow bumps or hugs.
 - h. There will be no offering plate passed. Offerings (checks preferred) may be put in the offering plates at the exits.
 - i. Until our permanent video system is installed, there will be cameras and microphones visible in the sanctuary to allow for our live stream broadcast.
11. Following worship, you will be asked to leave the sanctuary, with the north side aisle exiting through chapel doors, the center aisle through the main door, and those in the south aisle through the library door, with everyone practicing social distancing. To minimize crossing over, those nearest the doors will exit first. There will be no Coffee Hour at this time.
12. We ask that you do not go to any other part of the building. You are also asked to use the restrooms only if absolutely necessary. (Please plan ahead.)

Thank you for taking the time to read this. It is a lot to think about and keep in mind as we gather, but by taking these precautions we trust that we will be both glad and safe as we return to our "house of the Lord."



Daniel Love
Co-pastor



Kathryn Ridley
Clerk of Session