



August 11, 2020

Dear Concord Presbyterian Family,

I want to update you on plans for returning to in-person worship and other activities in our building. Earlier this summer, Session communicated our decision to hold off on in-person gatherings “until the end of summer at the earliest.” At our meeting last week, we unanimously decided that we will continue our current practice of online worship until the end of this calendar year.

I know how disappointing this probably is to hear. It was not a decision we made lightly. But we feel it’s necessary in order to continue protecting each other in the midst of this pandemic. As we consider the havoc the virus continues to wreak, with uncertainty about how school re-openings may affect the pandemic spread, and so much still being learned about how the virus is transmitted, we believe it is not yet safe to return to in-person worship in our building. Let me emphasize that this doesn’t mean we can’t find ways to gather in person in these coming weeks – I’ll come back to that in a moment.

We’re also concerned about the ways in-person worship would be affected by good safety practices, including limiting numbers and categories of persons allowed to attend, mask-wearing during services, and eliminating group singing. We can’t support resuming worship in a way that says, “Some of you are welcome, but some of you should stay away.” That goes against our understanding of the Gospel, and against the commitment we make in our Mission Statement to be *“a church family that welcomes, embraces, and loves all people, excluding no one from full involvement in the life of the church.”*

We also considered the need for significant planning and preparation for Advent and Christmas. That season is filled with special music presentations and special activities for children and youth and families. With the skills and commitment and creativity of our incredible staff and your volunteer efforts, we can still make this a special time for our Concord family. But we need to know well in advance whether to plan for in-person or online events. Limits on in-person participation, as well as the risk that the virus’ course in the fall could necessitate re-stopping in-person gatherings, helped us decide that continuing our current online approach through Advent and Christmas makes the most sense.

But we can still find ways to gather in the coming weeks. One event is already on the calendar: Sunday, September 13, will continue our Homecoming Sunday tradition, with a meal and fellowship in the parking lot after (online) worship. Spaces will be marked for those who want to tailgate, tables for others will be set up safe distances, households will provide their own food and beverages, and we'll practice social distancing and mask-wearing. It will be a bit different from how we've done it before—we're getting pretty good at doing things differently, aren't we? Watch for more details in the coming days.

We're also planning for other parking lot or lawn gatherings for meals and fellowship; even occasional worship services in the parking lot—not replacing Sunday morning online services, but in the evening, when the sun is behind the trees and we can share the joy of being in the presence of God and each other. Watch for more details in the coming days.

Friends, your Session members and I are asking the very same questions you're asking: *How long is this going to last? How long are we going to have to keep doing this?* As I know you realize, none of us can answer these questions right now. But remember this: *we will be together again.* We can't say when, but we know it will happen. In the meantime, we continue caring for each other by doing all we can to keep each other safe. We continue to encourage and support each other even if at a distance and behind a mask. We continue to love and support our neighbors and community who are also asking those same questions and facing those same challenges. In a word, we continue to be God's people scattered around the community, but with a common gathering ground at Fairfax and Foulk in Wilmington. We can continue to trust Christ's presence and leading, each day taking in the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit of God, poured into us . . . and breathing out into the world the deep peace, healing power, and welcoming love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of Christ be with us all, my friends.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Steve Clark,  
*on behalf of the Concord Session*