**APC Sanctuary Services Reopening Guidelines**

**Worship Committee**

**Introduction:**

Following more than seven months of APC’s sanctuary being closed for public worship, the Worship Committee proposes the following guidelines to safely re-open the sanctuary.

The committee is seeking a return to public worship in the sanctuary as soon as possible and will work with Session and APC staff on the timing of that re-opening. Indoor worship services will be reduced temporarily from two per Sunday to one per Sunday.

Re-opening for public worship is and should be regarded as an essential need for members of our congregation and community who are comfortable with gathering together in a safe way. With proper safeguards in place, there is no reason to keep the sanctuary closed. Many other churches in our community with larger congregations than APC have found ways to safely manage a re-opening of their sanctuaries on some level.

The committee anticipates that any opening will be gradual. The first worship service will likely be a truncated one, running about 40 minutes long and similar to our current outdoor worship service. Parts of our traditional worship service may then be added, as conditions in the community and the comfort level of our church congregation dictate.

**Mask Wearing:**

Until further notice, Session will require worshipers to wear masks inside the building. The church will stock and provide a backup mask to worshipers who do not have one. Masks may be temporarily removed only for the time required to take communion on communion Sundays. Pastors may unmask when speaking, and musicians who are distanced in the choir loft may unmask when playing.

**Capacity & Social Distancing:**

To maintain safe social distance inside the sanctuary, attendance will be limited, and state guidelines for gathering indoors will be followed. To allow as many as we can safely space within those guidelines, reservations may be necessary using something like Sign-up Genius. The congregation will be notified and provided all relevant information of any reservation system that is put into place.

Inside the sanctuary, at least every other pew will be roped off to maintain a 6-foot radial distance between worshipers. If needed to maintain that distance, more pews may be roped off. In addition, each open pew will only accommodate one family or up to two individuals or couples. A family could inhabit the entire pew, but unrelated individuals or couples would be stationed on the ends of the pew away from each other. To encourage safe distancing within the pew between unrelated parties, the Worship Committee proposes to use fabric-safe tape to mark a “no-go” zone in the middle of the pew. These lines could help safely separate congregants if they are not from the same family. From the center of each pew, the committee would measure at least three feet to either side, and then use the tape to create a line indicating the safe “borders”.

**Ushers:**

A team of two ushers would be on-hand at the beginning of the service to prop open all entry doors and direct people/answer questions about the seating arrangements. To minimize points of physical contact, bulletins will not be handed out. Instead, bulletins will be placed on the ends of each open pew for the occupants of that pew to pick up and use. All ushers will wear masks. Bulletins will also be available online for worshipers to access.

**Greeters and Entry:**

Greeters will also be present, wearing masks and maintaining social distance requirements. As the congregation arrives, a greeter will use one of APC’s forehead thermometers to check worshipers’ temperatures. Anyone with an elevated temperature of 100.4 degrees (per CDC) will be informed, asked to leave, and not allowed to enter.

Upon entering the building, worshipers will be asked to sign in (using a clean pen) with their contact information. That would a) provide accurate attendance numbers, b) allow anyone who needs information or wishes to join to let the church know and request a call, and c) provides public health tracking information in the event that someone in a service tests positive and the rest of the congregation in attendance that day needs to be informed.

**Acolytes:**

Acolytes will be assigned (clean) personal robes to take home and wear to the services in which they are participating for the calendar year. Their families will be in charge of keeping the robes clean. Clorox wipes will be used to wipe down the lighters and any other equipment. Acolytes must wear masks. Instead of sitting together in the narthex during the service, acolytes will return to sit with their families until further notice.

**Music:**

It is the committee’s understanding that singing presents a challenge with respect to the potential to spread virus. As we reintroduce elements into worship each week, Drew and Sam may add more music. That might include a soloist, or singers appropriately spaced out, if room allows. Music staff has requested up to eight singers, appropriately spaced. However, the public health advisors expressed concern about that number. Currently, six singers are allowed to participate in online worship. Singers will wear special “singer’s masks” while singing. The hymnals, pens, and envelopes will have been removed from all pews prior to the sanctuary re-opening for private prayer in November. The public health team advises against congregational singing at this point.

**Offering:**

To reduce physical contact, the ushers will not pass the offering plate. Instead, a plate will be placed at the front of the sanctuary, near the exit door, and a drop box will be placed outside the doors in the narthex. The ministers will announce that any offerings can be made electronically, brought to the front and dropped in the plate during the offertory, or placed in either location after the service. The two ushers will collect any offerings in the plate or box following the service and deliver to the office as usual.

**Communion:**

When communion is offered, pre-packaged communion elements (like the ones currently used for outdoor worship) will be distributed by an elder, who will wear a mask, at the beginning of the service when you enter the sanctuary. For those who require a gluten-free option, a small number of gluten-free wafers will also be made available in individual snack-size ziplock bags. Those will be prepared by the communion preparer, who is also providing the loaf and juice for the pastors to use at the communion table. The communion preparer will wear a mask and gloves when preparing the gluten-free wafers and the table elements. Two small lunch-sized paper bags will be placed on the ends of each open pew on communion Sundays, so that packaging from the elements may be thrown away after communion is celebrated. The masked and gloved communion preparer will gather and dispose of those bags after the service ends.

**Ventilation:**

Worship Committee has worked with the property committee to determine if current ventilation is adequate for our purposes. We currently have filtration that exceeds the recommended standard and filters are changed regularly. If necessary, we may look at keeping the one exit door open at the front and also keeping the sanctuary doors open with the Narthex doors open. Extra filtration, while nice, is not feasible at this time.

**Miscellaneous:**

Hand sanitizer bottles will be placed at the ends of each open pew for congregational use.

When the service is over, the pastors will leave as usual, but will not gather at the doors to shake hands/talk. Instead, they will move outside where they can speak and maintain social distance. Ushers will prop open all exit doors, including the ones at the front of the church, and will guide the congregation’s exit row-by-row (from back to front) to prevent a bottleneck at the exit doors and in the narthex.

No childcare will be available for the time being, and children must remain with their parents at all times. If children’s worship bags are made available, they will be similar to the outdoor worship bags, which go home with each child at the end of the service.

If overflow options are ultimately needed, the committee will work with Property and Tech to set up and safely space appropriate seating and audio/visual in the Fellowship Hall.

Finally, the committee recognizes the reality that many in our congregation are in the vulnerable demographic and/or may be nervous about returning to worship in public at this time for any number of reasons. The online video worship services have been very well done, and have provided their own sense of community and sanctuary to our congregation during this time. The committee recommends that some form of video worship be made available online indefinitely.