



May 21, 2020

Dear NEPC Church Family,

Greetings in the name of our resurrected Lord! How strange it is that I find myself writing my first letter to you as your Senior Pastor, in the midst of a once in a century global pandemic. But God is not surprised. I take great comfort in knowing that nothing catches God by surprise or is out of His control. God is sovereign over all, as Scripture says, and though we so often don't see it, "all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28)

I'm writing to update you on when and how our church will reopen for public worship on Sunday mornings. The Session of NEPC has been diligently discussing this very question over the last few weeks. I want to specifically highlight the efforts of the three Elders on the Worship and Adult Ministries Committee, Joe Necker, Jim Lehman, and committee chairman Ed Palekas. This committee has created a "Church Re-Opening Plan" which the entire Session approved at its May 18 meeting. The NEPC "Church Re-Opening Plan" is the product of many hours of work, comparison, revision, and prayer. The committee has reviewed dozens of similar plans from other churches, denominational agencies, and other organizations. We are confident that our plan puts us on a safe path forward to return to public worship. Our anticipated return date and "Church Re-Opening Plan" both reflect the conscientious and prayerful labors of our Session to love God's people well.

At this time, we are anticipating public worship at NEPC to resume on June 7th. That date could change if there is a spike in the virus in our area or if the Session deems it prudent for any other reason. We will return with two corporate worship services, at 8:45 and 11:15. The Session believes that 90 minutes is necessary between the services to properly prepare our facilities. **Masks will be required.** Please bring your own, if you have one. However, masks will be available to those who do not have them. **Masks will be required to enter the sanctuary.** The ushers will direct everyone to their seats to ensure proper social distancing. Dismissal from the sanctuary will be by row. Moreover, this will be a "touchless" service and all items will be removed from the pew-backs. Offering plates will be placed at each entrance for you to place your offerings as you enter or leave the sanctuary. Only the Sanctuary and Narthex will be open. The rest of our campus will remain closed until further notice.



I haven't mentioned every aspect of what returning to worship will look like, but as you can see, things will be different than March 8th, the last time we met as a church family at 601 Polo Road. If you are or have been sick, are in a high-risk group, or are fearful for your health, we welcome you to stay home and watch our live stream service at 11:15. And yes, you read that right, we are adding a live stream option which we will continue indefinitely into the future. For more information on our live stream service as June 7th approaches, please go to www.nepresbyterian.org/connect. If you miss the live stream service, a recording of the service will be available by the next day.

Our church's re-opening will occur in three phases. Everything I have talked about thus far is Phase 1. Phase 1 only includes the worship service. Sunday School gatherings and Next Gen. Ministry will still need to meet via Zoom during Phase 1. We know this is tough, but a gradual approach to re-gathering is the right one. Phase 2 will include smaller gatherings, such as Sunday School classes. We don't know when we will move from Phase 1 to Phase 2. That will depend on external conditions. Phase 3 will be very similar to church worship before the virus emerged, but with some additional safety measures out in place.

May I ask that you continue to pray for our church? We need your prayers. The Bible says to pray for wisdom and that God will give it (James 1:5). The Scriptures also tell us that God has "not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). God is greater than this virus and the horrendous disease it causes. It is under His ultimate power, and He has promised to never leave or forsake His people (Matt. 28:20). When we do return to public worship, it's going to be a little different. It's not going to be exactly like it was before. But we are going to appreciate it a thousand times more than we did on March 8th. To see your church family in the flesh, to give them a wave, to sit in the pew again, to hear God's Word proclaimed from the pulpit, it's still going to be a day of great rejoicing. For those of you who will be joining us via the live stream, you will be with us in spirit if not location. God has been faithful to NEPC for 40 plus years. We know with absolute certainty His faithfulness and mercies will continue, for they are new every morning. **I hope to see you on June 7th in person or via the live stream.**

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Josh