

A Policy For the Re-Opening of North Ridge and Ransomville UMC's

We must truly be thankful to the Lord our God for getting us to the point that we can again praise his Name in person together. As the people of the Risen Christ, let us rejoice in Him. Let us also continue to pray that he will bless our coming time together and hold all the forces of evil at bay, including the COVID-19 virus.

As the Governor of the State of New York has allowed that houses of worship can resume services at 25% capacity, we have now reached the point in which it is reasonable to begin having our worship together in person again. That being said, some changes in how we worship have to be made with consideration for maintaining a sense of community but balancing the needs to protect everyone from the Covid-19 virus. Upper New York Conference Guidelines as well as local, state, and federal guidelines were consulted in developing this policy for re-opening. We have tried to strike the best balance between the realistic and the ideal. I would ask everyone to review this policy before arriving to worship that there will be no surprises and no issues. We must all work together to make this happen safely and smoothly. This policy is a work-in-progress as it will be updated/ revised as experience and new data show need.

First off, it should be emphasized that everyone will be welcome to worship with us. Anyone who does not feel comfortable attending in person should continue to shelter in place and engage with online services. We will be continuing with online services for the foreseeable future and if you don't have a computer, a transcript of the service will continue to be mailed to you as soon after the Sunday service as possible. It is recommended that people who are immunocompromised to continue to shelter in place and engage with online services. In addition, it is suggested that infants and children too young to wear a mask the entire time of worship be kept home as well.

Anyone who cannot wear a mask the entire time for any reason must also stay home. This may seem harsh but, to quote Conference Guidelines, "The virus is spread through droplets that come into the air from breathing, sneezing, coughing, and singing. Religious ceremonies, as they take place in relatively enclosed spaces where many people are present for longer than 10 minutes, are at particular risk for spreading the virus to large groups of people." The masks are

important to reduce the volume of droplets entering the air. No one, including the pastor or worship leaders, is exempted from the use of masks. If for any reason, a worshiper does not have a mask, he or she will be provided one by the greeter at the door. Hand sanitizer will also be provided.

Before worship begins, the entire sanctuary, common areas, and bathrooms will be cleaned and sanitized. This includes the hymnals, pew Bibles, etc. All items not being used in worship will be removed ahead of time (pens, books, pamphlets, etc) so as not to increase chance of virus transmission. In addition, in the hours before worship, all hymnals/Bibles will be sanitized as well as the pews and any chairs in the sanctuary. Used hymnals and Bibles will be placed on the pews or seats so that they may be sanitized after worship as well. There will also need to be someone to make sure that elevator buttons/rails and stair rails are sanitized between uses. To maintain a constant airflow, the doors will be left open to create a draft, hopefully further reducing the concentration of the virus in the air.

As mentioned before, the greeter will now be responsible for ensuring that worshippers entering are wearing masks, hand sanitize and are aware of distancing and other requirements. They are also responsible for denying entry to anyone refusing to comply with the new policies. Remember: this is life and death and we must respect the rights of others to health and safety.

Upon entering, the worshipper will find the pews marked off with blue painters tape at six foot radius intervals. People living in the same house are exempted from the six foot radius requirement and may sit together and a six foot radius maintained from each family unit. There will be the necessary worship materials at each seat including a bulletin. We have decided to go with a bulletin produced using sanitary methods which prevents transmission of the virus from greeter to worshipper or worshipper to greeter.

A radius of six feet will be maintained at all times during worship. The passing of the peace will be from seats and no physical contact will take place. It was decided that hymns will be sung during our worship. While this is in contradiction with some guidelines, the logic behind the recommendation is flawed for three reasons: 1. We are using masks and the choir did not. 2. We are social distancing and the choir did not. 3. We are limiting the time exposure to

approximately an hour, much less than the choir who practiced for two and a half hours. Here is the reference consulted in that decision.

<https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>

Which brings up the issue of time. With the virus, time and our own bodies are our enemy. As mentioned in regard to hymn singing, it was too much time and not enough precautions that led to the spread of the COVID-19 to the above referenced choir. In order to cut back as much as possible the potential time of exposure, we will try to emphasize the need to hold off on fellowship before and after the worship service. The logic behind this is that we could be pushing dangerous exposure times if we add twenty minutes of fellowship onto our worship hours. Again, these are only temporary measures that hopefully will not be with us forever. We still have telephones, the internet, and the USPS to keep in contact.

At the end of the service, all worshippers will maintain six foot distancing while exiting. Hymnals and Bibles will be left on seats so that it is easier to sanitize after. Masks that are not reusable as well as the bulletins can be tossed into trash receptacles.

While this policy is not exhaustive, it is a good starting point to safely begin to worship in person. The key is to limit potential exposure by maintaining a six foot radius between worshippers and trying to keep the least amount of virus in the air as possible, hence the masks. We must not forget our most important weapon in this fight. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gives us the power to defeat any and all evils we may face. Pray. Pray. Pray!