

Return to Church Update 6-17-2020

The Task Force created to implement the four-stage Return to Church plan is working on several fronts to ensure compliance with the guidelines intended to keep us all safe as we prepare to enter Stage 2. With many other organizations gathering, people are asking when we will be able to meet on campus. We cannot set a date at present. The return to church requires setting up detailed procedures that need to be practical and sustainable.

Some of the complexities of the work around small group gatherings include:

1. “How can we effectively and compassionately communicate the expectations and requirements for small-group gatherings?”
2. “What happens when someone doesn’t want to comply with the precautions and refuses to wear a mask or sufficiently distance?”
3. “How can we ensure the small enclosed space of the restrooms are sanitized frequently and properly?”
4. “Who will be the persons responsible for upholding these expectations for everyone’s safety?”

The complexities around gathering for worship are just as sticky:

1. “How can we limit attendance for safety and not end up refusing entrance to some worshippers?”
2. “How can we create a worship experience when we can’t greet one another except from a distance, eat on campus, sing together or speak collectively without potentially spraying the virus?”

In our work, we have reached consensus around the following concerns regarding worship.

1. We do not want to exclude anyone. Our live-streaming worship experience will therefore be the central worship experience for the foreseeable future.
2. Since we are now welcoming over 2,000 people online, we are committed to continuing online worship even beyond this pandemic. We are grateful that the Trustees have approved funding from an estate gift of Wayne Lee Brown to finance necessary AV improvements and installation of a live-streaming system that will allow AV techs to work easily in Mission Valley and Ocean Beach. We will be exploring what an online community looks like as an expression of First Church.
3. We recognize that we have entered a new reality for worship as mentioned above. As such we will be exploring creative options for hosting small group gatherings and offering worshipful experiences that are consistent with what’s possible now. Rather than try to return to what we knew, we seek to set different expectations around a new experience that will bless us as it allows us to be together in smaller groups on campus.

We believe more than ever that God is moving among us, and the church is forced to be creative, responsive, adaptive, and innovative. It might feel like chaos. However, God does God’s best work when hovering over the chaos.

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