

Govans Presbyterian Church Approved Proposal for Transitioning to In-Person Operations

As we look forward to a time when a vaccine for the coronavirus will be widely available in the US, we need to create a plan for how the church will operate. We will be moving from a time when the church needed to be closed for public health reasons to a time when we need to allow our members to make their own decisions about the amount of risk they are willing to take.

We have already committed to a new level of accessibility and inclusion so that those who want to remain physically isolated may still participate in the worship and life of the church online.

We know that those who are fully vaccinated have a very small chance of being infected by the coronavirus and that the risk for serious illness and mortality in vaccinated people is extremely small. There are still unknowns and questions such as how long the vaccine's efficacy will last, or how well these vaccines protect special people like organ transplant recipients.

We also know that a significant percentage of the U.S. population will refuse to be vaccinated and we may not ever reach "herd immunity". The virus could be an endemic part of life going forward.

Although we have no idea if things will ever be "normal" again, we offer this plan as we seek to navigate a new normal.

Purpose of this Proposal:

- To create a path forward that is flexible and adaptable utilizing basic practices for mitigating risk, encouraging open channels of communication among participants and decision makers, and empowering the staff and congregation to work together to meet in a way that participants feel safe and comfortable.
- In the context of reasonable and careful community precautions, allow members of the church to evaluate the risks of in-person church activities for themselves.

Foundational Safety Practices:

- Masks must be worn on the church grounds (excluding staff members alone in their office, individuals or students at lunch or eating on breaks, or one person at a time leading worship).
- Social distancing must be practiced at all gatherings.
- No food or drink may be consumed on the church grounds. Individuals such as staff or students may still eat (lunch breaks, etc), but any group including church or rentals may not eat or drink.

Church Office

Since lock down in March of 2020 the Church Office has been officially closed to the public. Church Office staff (Pam and Andy) have been allowed to work from home if they wish or work from the office, but they are to keep the entry doors locked and there is a sign on the door saying the office is closed to the public.

In practice, Pam Wallace has been coming in every day. She prefers to work from the office. She keeps her office door closed and wears a mask when she is not in her office. Andy Wilson works from home some and comes into the office some. Sylvia Usher has never stopped coming in to do janitorial work. For a variety of reasons including difficulty getting deliveries and mail needing to be picked up, as well as contractors trying to get in, they began leaving the outer door of the church office unlocked so that people could enter the foyer and ring the bell to alert those inside of their presence.

In other words, at this point, the Church Office is closed in name only.

Opening the Church Office will include taking the "Closed" sign off the door, updating the website, and working to have the office staffed from 9-5, Monday through Friday. Of course, the inner door to the church office will remain locked at all times and people will need to ring the bell, and staff can still speak to people through the receptionist's window, as was the practice before lock down.

Proposal: The Church Office be opened effective May 3, 2021.

Building Use and Rentals

The two biggest challenges with renters are enforcing the mask mandate and controlling occupancy.

Moving forward each renter will need to be evaluated on a case by case basis. A Debtor's Anonymous meeting and New Wave Singers rehearsal present very different issues. Due to the volume of renters, we will need to move the decision making process away from Session.

Delegating these decisions to a Building Use and Rentals Approval Team (BURAT) made up of staff and members seems the best way forward. The teams should be given criteria to evaluate each rental. Those criteria should be: size of the group, relationship the group has with the church, activities being proposed, and the groups demonstration of compliance to Govans' Foundational Safety Practices.

The BURAT will be the Pastor, the Rental Manager, Clerk of Session, a member of the Facilities Committee, and a member of the church who is a medical doctor or public health professional.

The Rental Manager will make monthly reports to Session about which renters have been approved to use the building or denied.

So the BURAT can make informed decisions, we will expand and formalize the current practice of having a paid person on the grounds during some building rentals. We will call the new role a Church Steward. They will be on the grounds to monitor renters' activities until the BURAT determines that this requirement can be waived for any particular renter. We will also implement a mandatory deposit to be paid by renters and refunded upon positive report of the Church Steward of the renters' compliance with Foundational Safety Practices.

Proposal: To add the requirement of paid Church Steward to all rental contracts. The Church Steward will be paid hourly for their time on premises at a rate determined by the Pastor/Head of Staff. The cost of the Church Steward will be included in the rental prices. The Church Steward will be responsible for assisting the renters with building use issues as needed, and ensuring that church property is being respected and that all church policies are being followed.

Proposal: To appoint a Building Use and Rental Approval Team (BURAT) consisting of the Pastor/Head of Staff, Rental Manager, Clerk of Session, a member of the Facilities Committee, and a member of the church who is a medical doctor or public health professional. All decisions about building rental use will be delegated to the BURAT. The BURAT will have the authority and responsibility to approve all church rentals following current church policies. The BURAT will also have the authority to waive the requirement that a Church Steward be on the premises. As in all matters, the Session has the final authority over every decision made within the church. The Rental Manager will make monthly reports to the Session about which groups were approved or denied use of the building.

Proposal: Rooms must be cleaned, sanitized and if possible ventilated by church staff after each use and before being used by another group.

Proposal: To allow rentals to resume effective June 1st under the authority of a Building Use and Rental Approval Team (BURAT).

Soul Kitchen

Proposal: Decisions about the operation of Soul Kitchen will remain under the authority of the Soul Kitchen Committee. The decision to return to serving a sit down meal will require Session approval.

In-Person Worship

As stated above, we will be entering a time when we will allow individuals to make decisions about the risk they are willing to take regarding in-person church activities.

Until we have installed AV upgrades in the sanctuary we will prioritize the online worship experience. In other words, as we begin to allow people to be present in the sanctuary, the focus of the worship leaders must remain on the online service (including the use of unsightly broadcast equipment).

Allowing people back in the sanctuary for Sunday worship will happen in stages so we can learn and adapt with each increase in capacity not to exceed Baltimore City Guidelines.

Under our current policy 12 people are allowed in the Sanctuary during worship.

Proposal: To approve the following schedule:

Effective April 25th we will begin a sign up process to allow individuals to attend in-person worship. Sign-up priority will be given to worship leaders. Following current policy 12 people are allowed in the Sanctuary during worship.

Beginning Sunday, June 13th a total of 20 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.

Beginning Sunday, July 11th a total of 30 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.

Beginning Sunday, August 8th a total of 40 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.

Beginning September 12th a total of 60 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during worship.

Proposal: During the transition to more people worshipping in the sanctuary, every other pew will be roped off. One worship leader at a time may remove their mask. In lieu of congregational singing, vocal music will be sung by the music teams. All singers must remain masked.

In-Person Sunday School

By September just about every youth will be back to school in-person. Following the philosophy of this policy, decisions about in-person Sunday School should involve open communication with parents, listening carefully to concerns, and remaining adaptable. Though this policy will allow in-person Sunday School, masks wearing, social distancing, and food/drink prohibition must be followed. Outdoor classes are encouraged whenever possible and if moved indoors should be held in the largest space possible (such as Sharp Hall or the Waverly Room). Meaningful online participation should be made available to any who wish to participate online.

Proposal: To allow in-person Sunday School to resume September 12th, 2021.

Adult Options

We are likely to have church members who want to remain isolated or who are homebound wanting to participate in Adult Options remotely. We will also have people present in person who want to participate. A hybrid Adult Options should be created. Ideally, Adult Options should be broadcast from the church sanctuary to minimize groups of people having to move from room to room and occupy more than one room.

Proposal: To allow in-person/online hybrid Adult Option to resume September 12th 2021.

Fellowship After Worship

Fellowship after Worship will be encouraged on the Peace Terrace. Having Fellowship in the Sanctuary will not be practical if Adult Options is happening in the Sanctuary. Moving the group into the Gallery would just mean a large group of people occupying another room. In the spirit of adaptability and flexibility, this does not require a policy statement.

In-Person Indoor Eating Events

Potlucks and common meals require people to be unmasked indoors. Until Session approves otherwise we will not have unmasked indoor eating events.

The above policies would replace our current policies. The current policies reads:

The following policies apply to all church activities except Preschool which will be governed by the Govans Presbyterian Preschool Parent Handbook Addendum for COVID-19.

Until Session approves a plan for an in person worship option, Sunday worship will continue only online.

- Until Session approves a plan for reopening, the Church Office will remain closed to the public. Church staff may work from home or may come into the office.
- Everyone in the church buildings must wear a mask at all times and maintain social distancing. Exception: Children are encouraged to wear masks, but not required.
- Until Session approves otherwise, no rentals will be allowed in any church buildings.
- All bathrooms should be cleaned and sanitized daily if they have been used.
- Soul Kitchen may begin serving cooked takeout meals on June 21st with no more than 2 people working in the kitchen at one time.
- Outdoor services are allowed provided social distancing is observed and masks are worn.
- Up to twelve people may be present in the sanctuary during the worship broadcast. Masks will be worn, but one person at a time may remove their mask when speaking with the unmasked person being at least 10 feet from other participants. Singers should remain masked.
- Food or drink may not be consumed inside church buildings by renters or church groups. Consumption of food and drink may be permitted on a case by case basis to be approved by the Pastor and Rental Manager. The Preschool children and staff may consume food and drink at normal times for eating and breaks.

The new policy will read:

The following policies apply to all church activities except Preschool which will be governed by the Govans Presbyterian Preschool Parent Handbook Addendum for COVID-19.

- **Everyone in the church buildings must wear a mask at all times and maintain social distancing. Exception: Children under two years old should be encouraged to wear a mask but are not required.**
- **No food or drink may be consumed on the church grounds. Individuals such as staff or students may still eat (lunch breaks, etc), but any group including church or rentals may not eat or drink.**
- **All rooms must be cleaned, sanitized and if possible ventilated by church staff after each use by a group and before being used by another group.**
- **All rooms must be cleaned and sanitized daily if used.**
- **Rentals may resume on a case by case basis effective June 1st pending approval from the Building Use and Rental Approval Team.**
- **Soul Kitchen will continue to serve take out meals only until sit-down meals are approved by the Session.**
- **Attendance restrictions for in-person worship will follow this schedule:**
 - **Effective April 25th we will begin an online sign up process to allow individuals to attend in-person worship. Sign-up priority will be given to worship leaders. Following the current policy 12 people are allowed in the Sanctuary during worship.**
 - **Beginning Sunday, June 13th a total of 20 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.**

- **Beginning Sunday, July 11th a total of 30 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.**
- **Beginning Sunday, August 8th a total of 40 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during Sunday worship.**
- **Beginning September 12th a total of 60 people will be allowed in the Sanctuary during worship.**
- **During the transition to more people worshipping in the sanctuary, every other pew will be roped off. One worship leader at a time may remove their mask. In lieu of congregational singing, vocal music will be sung by the music teams. All singers must be masked.**
- **In-person Sunday School and Adult Options may resume September 12th, 2021.**
- **Outdoor activities are permitted provided masks are worn.**