



## *Tompkinsville United Methodist Church*

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4 September 2020

Dear TUMC Member,

The Church Council has approved the reopening of the church for Sunday worship starting on 13 September 2020.

This decision was based on several factors. The most important one is that since 7 August Lackawanna County has continued to meet the PA benchmark for reopening; i.e., fifty or less new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people for fourteen consecutive days. Similarly, both new case and death trends were down across the Commonwealth. Additional considerations that were taken into account include:

- 1) The CDC finding that the COVID-19 virus is now spread in aerosol form making it even more contagious, especially in enclosed spaces.
- 2) The fact that schools and colleges are having to close after reopening because of a surge in cases.
- 3) Projections for the fall heating season are for 100,000 new cases of COVID-19 each day and 315,000 deaths by early December.
- 4) Guidance from our medical professionals that the latest scientific data indicates COVID-19 complications are lasting much longer than expected with coronary, pulmonary and mental symptoms continuing in some cases for six months after contraction, but are expected to eventually clear, and that schools and churches thinking about reopening should take this into consideration.
- 5) The spikes in the number of new cases in Lackawanna County since 28 August, many of which have been localized to the University of Scranton.

The final decision was made after each Council member addressed the following two questions:

- 1) Given all of the precautions we have taken to reopen and that we meet all of the guidelines, can we say we will “Do No Harm” in reopening?
- 2) Am I (each Council member) comfortable with reopening?

While the Council cannot with absolute certainty say that reopening will “Do No Harm,” it did agree that, at this time, the risk is small that anyone in the congregation will contract COVID-19 as a result of attending worship services so long as they observe all of the CDC, PA and Susquehanna Conference guidelines. With this in mind, the Council was able to say that it was comfortable with reopening at least in the short term.

So what are the CDC, PA and Susquehanna guidelines that you need to observe in coming back to worship? Our letter of 16 July lays out in detail what to expect when you come back to church. The most important guidelines for you to observe are:

- 1) Stop for a temperature check at the back door before entering.
- 2) Wear a face mask without vents, holes, etc. Masks with vents, holes, etc. make it easier to breath, but according to the CDC they do not prevent the virus from getting into the air.
- 3) Upon entering the church, go directly to your seat in the sanctuary; i.e., do not loiter in the fellowship hall or the aisles in the sanctuary.
- 4) Observe social distancing; e.g.,
  - a. Do not shake hands.
  - b. Keep a minimum of six feet apart; i.e., note the markings on the floor and carpet.
  - c. Observe the seating arrangements in the sanctuary; i.e.,
    - i. S/C marks a space for one person or a couple.
    - ii. F marks a space for a family.
- 5) Do not sing or respond to responsive readings. Each week a member will be identified to do the responsive readings on behalf of the congregation.
- 6) After the service, go directly to your car; i.e., do not loiter in the fellowship hall or the aisles in the sanctuary

Also in accordance with PA guidelines, attendance will unfortunately be limited to twenty-five people. If attendance starts to exceed twenty-five people, some of our leaders have volunteered to give their seats up so that others may attend. If attendance still exceeds twenty-five people, you may be asked to not attend. If so, please understand that no one, neither Pastor Beth nor the Church Council, wants to turn away anyone from worship, but observing the guidelines and keeping people safe; i.e., "Do No Harm," requires that we do so. We ask for your understanding and cooperation.


The church may be open for worship services for only a short period. Two things will cause the Church Council to shut the church down again.

- 1) A rise in the number of new COVID-19 cases in the County beyond the CDC benchmark.
- 2) Failure on the part of members to observe the CDC, PA and Susquehanna Conference guidelines outlined in our 16 July letter and above.

The Church Council is pleased that it could finally reach a decision to reopen the church for worship even under these restrictive circumstances and even if it is for only a very short time. It wants to thank you in advance for your understanding and cooperation during these trying times.

Whatever the future holds, the Council will continue to make decisions that are in the best interest of the safety of the membership of TUMC and the surrounding community which during this pandemic starts with John Wesley's first simple rule, "Do No Harm."

Respectfully,

  
Elizabeth D. Taylor  
Pastor, TUMC

  
Ralph T. Allen  
Chairman, TUMC Church Council