

## NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST

### ***Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner***

**Update:** The “Mandated Reporter Training” on Saturday, June 27, 2020 at Grove Presbyterian Church, Danville, **has again been postponed**. The PA Family Support Alliance announced that it will do no face-to-face trainings through July. At that point, a new date will be announced.

**You are invited to participate in a discussion of VBS/Camp alternatives in this time of COVID 19.** May 27<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. Time and link will be sent at a later date. Please send questions you would like covered to [nurture@grovepres.org](mailto:nurture@grovepres.org).

### **Is It Old Practice or Is It New? I’m A Bit Confused. Maybe It Is Just Best Practice!**

Recently I participated in several conversations and webinars grappling with the challenges of re-entry to physical worship. As I listen to the discussions, concerns and suggested solutions, my mind drifts to historical practices in church worship. Those days when each family packed its own lunch basket and brought it to church. Days when churches were not heated, and each family member brought a foot-warmer or hot potato. Times when each worshiper was responsible for their own psalter or prayer book. Sometimes if one did not have the appropriate worship items one might be refused into worship. When liturgy was memorized because multiple copies were not available. Times when pews were numbered and purchased by families where the whole family sat together rather than youth in the balcony and toddlers in childcare. No Sunday School option available, only worship. Offering baskets on long poles so no one touched them except the Deacons. Tickler poles to awaken individuals before they nodded off to sleep and accidentally touched a neighbor. Times when gloves and hats worn was the social expectation. Before March 2020 we snickered at those practices, said how archaic and ridiculous, how inequitable were some of these practices, but where are we now? Not far from instituting similar practices.

Here are some of the solutions which are being discussed and questions to raise regarding the practices. The size of congregation and the physical plan of the church building determines what will work best for particular congregations but our underlying theology, understanding of worship and faith practice must guide as well.

*Let’s Talk About Assigning Seats in Worship:* This ensures social distancing, allows the tracking of exposure and can take many forms.

- Rope off pews so seating can only happen 6 feet apart
- Label useable seats with a sign again located 6 ft. apart
- Limit number of worshipers based on the sanctuary plan once 6 ft. plan is created

*Questions which come up:*

How do you accommodate different size families?

Who does this marking? Is it flexible as different size family units enter?

Will asking someone to sit in the front or the back – on the left or the right be offensive to some? Will people have choice within the matrix?  
How do worshipers engage in fellowship?

*Let's Talk About Signing Up for Worship or Taking Reservations:* Once you know how many people your physical area safely can accommodate, then you need to decide how to maintain that number. Key to re-entry is keeping groups small and in ratio to the space available. This also can take many forms.

- Count at the door and stop entrance once the limit is met
- Take reservations for Sunday worship – worshipers must call in advance to signup
- Divide congregation up into groups with Group 1 worshipping on the first Sunday of the month, Group 2 on the second Sunday of the month, etc.
- Create multiple worship hours
- Stream the service from the sanctuary into the fellowship hall and create two venues

*Questions which come up:*

How is the sanctuary cleaned between the multiple services?

Who gets to sit in the sanctuary and who in the fellowship hall?

What do you do with a last-minute visitor?

Is it worth advertising worship if visitors cannot be accommodated?

How does the congregation continue to exemplify Christian outreach and hospitality when it might be forced to turn someone away from worship?

*Let's Talk About Grouping Worshipers:* Grouping worshipers can limit the exposure to great numbers of people and help track exposure.

- Require families to stay and sit as a family unit during worship
- Require children to stay with family in pew during children's sermon (It is OK, if they stand on the pew to see.)
- Create groups by vulnerability or neighborhoods (First Sunday of month is 65yrs+.)

*Questions which come up:*

How are the groups kept equitable?

How are the groups prevented from becoming established cliques which linger long after COVID19?

Is it loving to assign labels?

If divided, how is an intergenerational diverse worship community representing the whole body of Christ maintained? (Remember what the Book of Order says about worship)

*Let's Talk About No Child Care and No Sunday School in the Early Phases:* This may be the most difficult for some to accept but because of the nature of children and the nature of this disease, it is best that these remain for much later in the Phases of Re-entry.

- Require children to stay with parents (guardian) for the entire worship
- Close off Sunday School rooms and nursery
- Make worship family oriented and child welcoming

*Questions which come up:*

How will parents and children be informed regarding new practices?  
Should the Christian Educator work more closely with the pastor to plan worship?  
Should worship be adapted?  
Is now the time to have conversations about what worship is?

*Let's Talk About Touchless Worship:* Limiting the items multiple individuals touch during worship helps minimize sharing of germs. I imagine we may find great use for those grabber devices provided for special accommodations and seniors.

- Remove hymnals and Bibles from pews
- Remove Worship Bags
- Designate a drop bucket at the door for offering
- Purchase single use communion
- Eliminate a hand-to-hand passing of the peace
- Put bulletin, songs, scriptures online for worshipers to access on their phones
- Designate one door holder

*Questions which come up:*

How will people know the words to prayers, songs and scriptures?

What if a worshiper does not have a phone?

What if the church does not have strong WIFI?

How does a helping, compassionate, hands on congregation become a hands-off congregation? How does that effect the worshiper emotionally and spiritually?

*Let's Talk About Bringing Own Worship Items:* The flip side of stripping the sanctuary of items is asking the families to provide their own.

- Require families to provide a mask, gloves, hand sanitizer
- Ask families to bring cell phone/ipad for viewing bulletin
- Have families bring their own Bible whether physical or downloaded and worship bag

*Questions which come up:*

What do you do if someone comes without a mask or takes it off during worship?

What if a worshiper cannot afford these items?

Can the congregation afford to provide masks, sanitizer, ipads?

How do we come to terms with our understanding that God receives us "just as we are" and the imposition of these pre-requisites to worship?

*Let's Talk About Educating Worshipers:* Whoever thought Christian education would come to include the correct way to put on a mask or gloves and how to sneeze in your elbow? But it has.

- Communicate clearly the church's policies and reasons
- Be prepared to remind and restate the guidelines
- Demonstrate safe behaviors
- Offer options -- if the quota has been met in sanctuary worship can people still access worship online
- Explain how things will be different and why
- Remember to enforce the guidelines with God's love, compassion, and gentleness

- Continue to communicate the sovereignty of God, presence of the Holy Spirit, and love of Christ even in these difficult times particularly with young children because they are the ones who will have difficulty sorting out the teaching of Christ and these temporary restrictions. I can image there will be children who when asked in 20 years from now, “Why when you come to church do you never sit with anyone?” Answering, “Because in my church growing up we had to sit 6 ft. apart.” The children remember the practice and not the preaching so we need to highlight the teaching and frame the practices in the light of the teachings of Christ.

*Questions which come up:*

How do we follow these guidelines out of compassion for our neighbor without the practices becoming dogma, a gatekeeper to worship, stumbling blocks for people or habit?

How do we communicate that these practices are for now only and out of love and care for our neighborhood?

Maybe at the core of some practices are just Best Practices:

Worshiping as a Family

Preparing Ourselves for Worship

Practicing Common Courtesy and Respect

Being Guided by Christ’s Teachings

*Remember Worship is for All God’s People.* If a congregation is not prepared to address the concerns of COVID19 in an equitable loving manner, then it may not be ready for re-entry.

#### **Interesting Resources:**

Re-Opening Churches: <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/facility-management-after-covid19>

Re-Opening Children’s Programs: <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/blog/childrens-ministry-after-covid19>

American Baptist Thoughts on Online and Live Streaming Technology:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugwxM-fZEHo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR37fpVfqMASidTHUL-FzhkytH9EeUoH3A7C9IUbkUKWRIArho0OwEa\\_G-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugwxM-fZEHo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR37fpVfqMASidTHUL-FzhkytH9EeUoH3A7C9IUbkUKWRIArho0OwEa_G-A)

Creating Policies for Virtual Church: <https://buildfaith.org/the-piece-were-all-forgetting-digital-church->

[policies/?mc\\_cid=bf86afabe4&mc\\_eid=8183923a83&fbclid=IwAR2GVKgiSpnV9OJC5yz72V7WPUA1WPdOoquw2St\\_U5Hk6T4\\_xs82DR1w11g](https://buildfaith.org/the-piece-were-all-forgetting-digital-church-policies/?mc_cid=bf86afabe4&mc_eid=8183923a83&fbclid=IwAR2GVKgiSpnV9OJC5yz72V7WPUA1WPdOoquw2St_U5Hk6T4_xs82DR1w11g)