

Rationale and Hopes for In-person Worship

An Explanation from Pastor Tracie and the Session of The Old Scotch Church

At the April 13 Session meeting, Session voted to continue with online worship through June 13, with the hope of trying to do outdoor in-person worship possibly by June 20. Please see the Session rationale and challenges to both outdoor and indoor in-person worship below, as we navigate coming back to church. Please also know that we are all eager to worship together, but doing so is complicated and takes planning, time, and volunteers.

Rationale:

In determining when our church sanctuary can reopen for worship, Session prayerfully considered and was guided by the following rationales:

1. **Equal in access to worship for all those who wish to attend:**
 - a. This means waiting until all adults are eligible for a vaccine, and have had time to schedule an appointment, get their two shots, and have time for antibodies to be produced. At best, this time frame is about 8 weeks, and April 19 is the first day of full adult eligibility for the vaccine. This rationale also means no one will be turned away from worship or checked for a vaccination card.
 - b. Indoor seating is limited by spacing, and our sanctuary is relatively small. We have determined about 23 individual people can sit upstairs and 32 individuals can watch the service downstairs, for a total of 55 individuals at worship. Thus, equal access to worship cannot be accomplished, as we expect that more than 55 people would like to come, and certainly more than 23 would like to see worship personally, and not on a screen.
2. **Adherence to federal, state, and local re-opening and sanitation recommendations.**
 - a. This included CDC, State of Oregon, and Washington County recommendations, risk assessment level guidelines, and mandates. If there are differences between local, state, or federal guidelines, we follow the more restrictive set of guidelines due to the medical diversity of our congregants and to ensure we are protecting our most vulnerable. Following these guideline enables us to remain in compliance with civil regulations and also embody love of our neighbors, work for the common good, and protection of the most vulnerable among us.
 - b. At present, the sanctuary would need to be cleaned with disinfectant after each use per federal, state, and local guidelines. Our janitorial staff does regular basic cleaning. However, the cost of cleaning after someone tested positive is very high (thousands of dollars) as it requires a specialized level of cleaning not performed by regular janitorial staff. If someone attending our church tested positive, janitorial staff could not enter the building for 24 hours. Then, cleaning has to be done by a professional disinfecting service to deep clean all hard and soft surfaces. The other major concern is that as a historic church, the use of those disinfecting products on our historic wood surfaces could damage those surfaces if not done professionally.

Online notes: A recording of the live outdoor or indoor service will be posted to our YouTube channel by Sunday night, unless there are technical or personnel issues. Hymns and the prayer list will still be emailed each Friday. Please note there is a difference between the production quality of current online services and live service recordings.

The Re-opening plan:

Summer outdoor worship has the advantage of better weather, eased capacity (presently up to 200 people), and the ability to distance, sing, and enjoy a beautiful setting. Setting up worship in the back of the church is volunteer and time intensive, so Session is considering setting up the pulpit on the deck outside the front office, which is raised for easier visibility. Attendees can take places in part of the front circle, on the sidewalk, under trees, and in the grass of the cemetery, with family units sitting together. Attendance and bathroom use is entirely the choice and risk of each participant.

Recommendations for attendees would be:

- Bring your own chair or blanket to sit on.
- Bring an umbrella/parasol for rain or sunshine.
- Masks or shields are recommended, especially during singing, but not required as we can be physically distant. When under 6 feet distancing cannot be maintained, masks are required.
- Vaccines are recommended, but not required. However, if not vaccinated we strongly encourage you to wear your mask.
- Families with children too young for the vaccine are welcome, as each family makes their own choice (no nursery will be offered). However, please make sure they are kept within your family pod and are accompanied by an adult if needing to roam.
- An offering plate will be available for giving at a stationary place, but will not be passed, and mailed tithes and offerings will continue.
- Communion plans are yet to be determined, with more information coming
- Bulletins will be available with hymns, but we request you take yours with you when you leave
- Bathrooms will have Clorox wipes available so you can wipe down surfaces after using. However, use of the bathroom is at your own risk
- Parking is still recommended for the back lot, due to traffic, with front spaces available for those with mobility issues
- **REQUIRED:** Current county mandate is that people distance 6 feet from other family units

In order to get an idea about current interest in outdoor in-person worship, and to hear other questions or concerns, Session is asking the Contact Callers to get feedback on the outdoor service described above, as well as a general idea of how many would like to attend, and how many would continue to watch online. In addition, this type of service will need volunteers of equipment moving, technical help, ushers, safety managers, special music providers, and liturgists. If you can help in any of these ways, please also let the Contact Caller know.

In-person Plans for Indoor Worship:

Again, please hear that the Session is eager to get back to in-person worship in our sanctuary. However, there are space challenges and protocol challenges related to cleaning, HVAC maintenance, contact tracing, and airflow. In addition, our worship elements of stewardship, singing, communion, and care for our children need thoughtful consideration and planning.

At this point, the best estimate from Session for in-person worship in our sanctuary will hopefully happen in the fall. For your own reading and education, this short list of the MANY protocol guidance resources available may help you understand the complexities we face. Again, if you'd like to help, please call or email the church office. We'd love more volunteers!

Helpful resources:

Cascades Presbytery Guidance: <https://www.cascadespresbytery.org/when-will-things-open-up-again/>

Church Insurance Checklist: <https://p.widencdn.net/r87ip0/CM0308-2020-05-RC-Recommendations-for-a-Safe-Return-to-Worship>

CDC Cleaning Guidance: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Freopen-guidance.html

Questions, suggestions, or concerns are welcomed by any Session member.