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Bellefield Practices During the “Yellow Phase” of COVID-19

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion...How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? --Psalm 137:1,5

This is the cry of the people of God when they were in exile. Dislocated in every way from what was familiar, their sorrow reverberates in the words of the psalmist: *'How shall we praise the Lord when we do not have access to our place of worship? How shall we lift our voices in joy when our shoulders droop with the burdens of worry and anxiety?'*

Similar questions have faced us all in recent weeks. Your Elders, Staff, and I have spent much time discerning how it is that we can remain faithful to our biblical and theological convictions about corporate worship and also be responsible in how we lead so as to guard the health of the congregation and honor those who govern our land. *How shall we worship the Lord when our context is so different than before?*

A biblical framework orients us to the following truths:

- We are to regularly gather together for worship (Acts 2:46; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:25)
- We are to love our neighbors and care for those who are vulnerable (Mark 12:31; James 1:27)
- We are to honor those who govern (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:17)
- Those who are 'strong' are called to not exercise their rights at the expense of those who are 'weak', but to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 8:9)
- We are to bear one another's burdens and demonstrate humility, gentleness, and patience towards one another (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:2)

Given all this—and given the restrictions still in place during Allegheny County's "yellow phase"—your Session has decided on the following at this time.

ONLINE WORSHIP: We will not have any onsite worship in the sanctuary while group gatherings over 25 persons are prohibited, as they are in the “yellow phase”. The challenge of adhering to all necessary safety protocols and determining which 25 people are included each week leads us to believe it is better to wait until larger groups are permitted. Till then, we will continue our 'worship from home' format and post the service online as we have been doing. *[DVD or CD copies are also available upon request]* We have chosen this format as a way to nurture our relational community even as we are distanced from one another, and we pray that this approach has helped you feel connected to others in the congregation.

WORSHIPING WITH OTHERS: For those who are comfortable doing so, we invite you to consider gathering in small groups and using the online service as a way to worship together. This could be with friends, neighbors, family, or your small group. It is vital that any group gatherings follow all necessary safety protocols, and we will be distributing a brief guide for those who are considering doing so. We are also exploring the possibility of setting up a few "neighborhood watch parties" around the city where people could gather to worship using the online service. We'll update you in coming days as we develop these plans.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: While our position on refraining from 'virtual' Communion remains the same, the possibility now exists for some kind of in-person celebration done in small groups. We are considering various

options for this and discussing ways we might be able to do this that are faithful to our convictions about this sacrament and responsible in our administration of it. We will communicate our plans when they are in place.

SMALL GROUPS/BIBLE STUDIES: We are not currently hosting any small groups or bible studies onsite at the church building, though we encourage you to continue participating in these together online or, for those willing and comfortable, with others in your home. [Again, any in-person gatherings need to follow appropriate safety protocols.]

OTHER BUILDING USE: The building will remain closed to other events, groups, and meetings.

We will, of course, continue to monitor the situation and update the status of these things as we go. In the meantime, as we plan out next steps and prepare for more 'relaunching' steps, we ask that you **please take the brief survey found on our website**. This will enable us to get a sense of what steps will be most effective and beneficial for the congregation.

I continue to pray this finds you healthy and safe!

Grace and peace,

Josh