



Conley's United Methodist Church

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Updated June 1st, 2020

Dear Conley's Church Family,

The restrictions on in-person gatherings imposed by the state in response to COVID-19 dramatically impacted routine practices in virtually all areas of life including corporate worship. At Conley's, we—like everyone else—are eager to return to the in-person activities to which we are accustomed, and we are encouraged by news that Delaware is gradually “re-opening.” As a church, we strive not merely to adhere to a timetable or set of regulations but to prayerfully discern the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit for our congregation. We believe that the most effective way to bear witness to the Spirit of Christ within us during this pandemic is to care for the health and welfare of our neighbors. Therefore, we have strived to work together with our neighbors in the community-wide effort to mitigate the spread of the virus. As restrictions are lifted, we will continue the practice of compassionate cooperation through respectful consideration of recommendations issued by the Delaware Department of Health as well as civil authorities.

Throughout this crisis I have been working with the Church Council and key leaders of the church to develop a protocol so that Conley's is prepared to efficiently re-open our sanctuary to in-person worship as restrictions are lifted. On May 18th, Governor Carney issued guidelines for communities of worship in Delaware, and on Sunday, May 31st, we re-opened our sanctuary on a limited basis. I rejoice that the re-opening process is now underway; however, the first phase of re-opening imposes extensive restrictions on in-person worship. . . restrictions that will keep most of our parishioners at home.

I encourage everyone to continue to join us online during this first phase of re-opening. Conley's will continue to focus on preparing and leading an online worship service using the same format and liturgy that we have been using since March.

For those who choose to join us in-person, the following protocol for Conley's Church was established with close attention to the guidelines issued by Governor Carney (the full text of Delaware's "Guidelines for Communities of Worship" may be viewed here:

<https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/177/2020/05/Communities-of-Worship-Guidance-Revised-5.23.20.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3n1qG0SzIOwd2N6R9XiN-4m4iLkTipNA3P7iKJENuUQxwUT054596zomQ>

Phase One: In-person worship with extensive restrictions

People who are at risk to contract or spread COVID-19 are not permitted to attend. *At risk* is defined as:

- Anyone having a cough, high fever, or shortness of breath
- Anyone who has been exposed to anyone with COVID-19 in the preceding 14 days

People over the age of 65 are considered vulnerable to contract the virus and are, therefore, encouraged to continue joining us online rather than in person.

For those who choose to attend worship in the sanctuary, Social distancing protocols include:

1. Congregants may only enter/exit the church building through the narthex doors.
2. Greeters will open the doors for arriving congregants and welcome them without shaking hands or any other physical contact.
3. Ushers will guide congregants to available seating.
4. Facemasks will be required of everyone 3 years of age or older. Congregants should bring their own facemask; however, Conley's will have a limited number of masks available for anyone who may not already have one.
5. Speakers, readers, singers, etc. may remove their facemasks while carrying out their part in the service, provided they maintain a 10-foot distance from the congregation, and must replace their facemask immediately upon completion of their part in the service.
6. Singing is permitted, but choirs or other groups too large to accommodate social distancing are prohibited. Congregational singing is permitted, but congregants must keep their facemasks on.
7. Families and others living in the same household may sit together; non-household members must maintain a six-foot distance between one another on the pew. Seating will be limited to every other pew, and pews will be marked at six-foot intervals
8. Offering plates and wireless microphones may not be passed among congregants. Reception of offerings and prayer requests will continue to be limited to online and mail-in options only.
9. Attendance is limited to 30% of stated occupancy plus essential staff/volunteers provided there is adequate space for social distancing (our sanctuary can accommodate approximately 60 congregants under this guideline).

I ask that everyone be prepared to be flexible, understanding, and gracious as we work out details as we go along. While these guidelines are very restrictive, let's be encouraged that we are moving toward re-opening in-person worship . . . however slowly. While the restrictions are not ideal, and many may believe they are excessive, it is important to remember that they have been made out of an abundance of caution motivated by a desire to protect people's health. Conley's will continue to respect civil authorities and be thankful that we are free to worship openly even while under temporary physical restrictions. And the restrictions *are* temporary; they are merely

short-term steps being taken to get us from where we have been (no in-person worship at all) to where we want to be (whosoever will may come!) as safely and efficiently as possible.

Governor Carney will issue guidelines for the next phase when the threat of COVID-19 diminishes. The protocol that Conley's has been working on includes tentative guidelines for the next phase based on the best information we have at this point; we stand ready to make necessary modifications as more information and guidelines become available so that we will be prepared to move forward as quickly as possible. Please join me in praying for the health and welfare of our church family, and that these restrictions on in-person worship will be short lived. May God bring a swift end to this health crisis.

Peace,
Pastor Bill Davis