

St. Paul's United Church of Christ

101 Worthington Road
Exton PA 19341

610.363.7285
www.saintpaulsucc.net

**COVID-19 Response Update
July 23, 2020**

Members and Friends of St. Paul's:

Peace be with you. I hope that this finds you and your loved ones in good health. When I first wrote to you – a million years ago, back in March – about the COVID-19 pandemic, I mentioned that we would continue to monitor the public health situation so that we could respond effectively to an ever-changing crisis. I am writing to give you an update on our response.

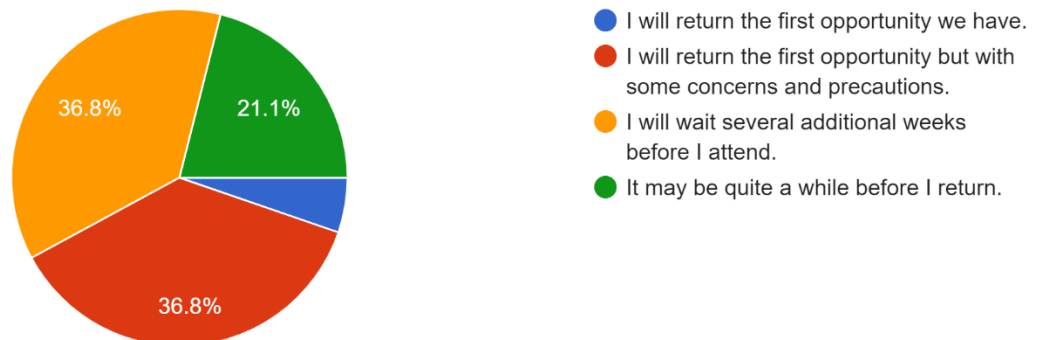
Task Force & Survey

At the end of May, the consistory formed a reopening task force to help us plan our next steps. This task force, consisting of Fran Pluchino, Ryan VanderMeulen, Bill Miller, Greg and Lisa Allen, and myself, began by studying a panoply of resources, including: public health information from federal, state, and local agencies; guidance from the United Church of Christ and other ecumenical bodies; recommendations from the church Insurance Board; etc.

At the end of June, the task force circulated a survey to the congregation. We were very pleased with the rate of response, and most grateful for your comments that will help us to make plans and improve our programs. The first questions showed that 58% of respondents would be likely to wait before returning, while 42% of respondents would like return at the first opportunity. Here is the exact breakdown:

Which best describes your attitude toward returning to a worship service at church?

38 responses



The second question showed that roughly 20% of respondents would be open to indoor worship, 40% would be open to outdoor worship, and 40% will continue to worship online. Feeling that the risk of indoor worship would be too high at the present time (and mindful of the extra complications of reopening the building for communal use), the task force has focused for now on the question of what steps would need to be taken to prepare for outdoor worship, if the consistory decided to move in that direction.

Consistory Discernment

At its July 21 meeting, the consistory took up the question of whether the time was right to resume some form of in-person worship. It was a thoughtful and broad-ranging conversation, as the group weighed hopes and desires with risks and liabilities. With a sincere appreciation for the hardship of being apart, and heartfelt sympathy for the feelings of those who feel ready to return, the consistory did not feel comfortable with a return to in-person worship. Even in the days since the survey, we have seen a rise in cases and deaths nationwide. Just yesterday, four states reported daily death records due to COVID-19. We have seen churches and other organizations reopen only to close again after exposure, even when following all of the recommended guidelines. Out of an abundance of caution, and with a special concern for more vulnerable members of our church and wider community who may be impacted by our actions, the consistory has decided that we are not ready to change our course.

I know that this decision will be greeted with mixed emotions. Some will be happy and relieved, and others may be disappointed and frustrated. I would like to invite all of us to carry these feelings to God in prayer, that we may find in this moment an opportunity to share the grace of Christ with each other. If the world is angry, let us be kind. If the world is impatient, let us wait for the Lord. If the world is divided by disagreement, let us seek healing by opening our hearts to one another in love. Now, more than ever, the world needs a witness from the church, and this is our time to shine. Whether we are gathered or scattered, God gives us a light to shine.

If you have any thoughts, questions, or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. I've also attached a sheet summarizing our current ministry offerings and opportunities. And please know that the work of the task force, and the discernment of the consistory, will continue. We have passed another milestone in our journey, and as we travel onward we will continue to rely on God and each other for courage, strength, and wisdom. So stay tuned – not just for more information, but for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who guides and upholds us all along our pilgrim way.

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan

Rev. Jonathan Hauze, Pastor

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
Ministry During the Pandemic

Updated July 2020

Worship

- Online Worship, Sundays at 10:30AM, on our YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzsT8y6RNnhqyKd3F4PjYzg>

Fellowship

- Zoom coffee hour after online worship on Sunday mornings
- Zoom social hour at 6:30PM on Wednesday evenings
- Zoom Youth Group most Sundays at 7:00PM
- Monthly Zoom First Friday at 7:00PM

Spiritual Formation & Education

- Daily reflections, Monday-Saturday, from Pastor Jonathan, posted on:
<https://www.facebook.com/St-Pauls-United-Church-of-Christ-in-Exton-PA-28857663754>
and <http://www.jonathanhauze.wordpress.com>
- Sacred Conversations on Race discussion series, beginning on Zoom on July 25. For more information visit the webpage:
<https://saintpaulsucc.net/education/sacred-conversations-race>

Service Opportunities

- Donate to Summer Mission for the Lord's Pantry of Downingtown:
<https://saintpaulsucc.net/ministry/summer-mission>
- Record special music or scripture reading for online worship. Email us to volunteer.
- Sew a mask for our face mask ministry. To volunteer, or to request a mask, see the online form at <https://forms.gle/Ssr62eySbR5qYU16>
- Help to keep the church grounds in good shape by gardening (weeding), picking up trash, removing fallen limbs
- Send cards / make phone calls to isolated members
- Pray!

*For Zoom login information, or to learn more about service opportunities,
please reach out to us by phone or email (stpucc@verizon.net).*