

Dear NRPC,

Peace to you during these very hot days in August! Even though the days are sweltering now, the weather will cool eventually. With that in mind, Session has been discussing the Worship format for September and October. This is a note to update you on decisions taken recently by Session:

1. Starting September 12th (Sunday after Labor Day), Sunday Worship service will return to a 10:30 am start.
2. Also, for the months of September and October, we will continue to:
 - a. Maintain outdoor worship services on the 1st and 3rd Sundays
 - b. Maintain the use of masks and social distancing for indoor worship services.

These decisions were taken by NRPC Session members after much discussion and careful, prayerful deliberations. Our decisions regarding Worship structure have tried to adhere to underlying principles, and the Session would like to share these principles with you to continue communication and engagement. As a Session body, we strive to balance the following while always looking forward to a time that we can safely gather in person without restrictions. We strive to:

1. Ensure worship is inclusive.

That means all ages and stages of life are invited to worship at NRPC from our youngest members, who cannot be vaccinated, to our older members who may reside in communities with higher risk individuals.

2. Love and protect our neighbors.

This means not only protecting those who gather inside the sanctuary, but also ensuring that we do not put our wider community at risk, both children and higher risk individuals. We also do not know the vaccination status of those who attend worship.

3. Follow local guidance and Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines.

Currently, Raleigh is under a mask mandate; however, prior to that, the CDC recommendation was for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals to wear masks indoors in areas of substantial or high community transmission. Wake County is currently experiencing high community transmission.

Additionally, our process includes seeking feedback from all members of Session, staff, other churches in our local Presbytery as well as our own congregation. We try to balance all these components while also trying to have recommendations that are not changing too much to have guidance that is easier to follow. Having said that, however, the decisions above will be reviewed in October to determine the schedule and format for late fall and early winter.

As a Session, we would like to ask for your prayers as well as your continued patience and input. We understand how stressful and hard these times can be, and Session also yearns as a collective body to be gathering as we were prior to COVID. However, we are also confident that our church – our connections to each other – and our faith will grow stronger as we face these challenges together, working with each other with God's love in our midst. As both Paul and James remind us, trials produce perseverance and endurance, and those traits will grow a persevering faith within our church family that will make NRPC even stronger to carry God's word into the world.

In faith,

Session of NRPC