

December 21, 2021

Dear Friends,

As we prepare to celebrate a second pandemic Christmas, your safety and well-being weighs heavily on us. We are considering how we gather for Christmas Eve worship in ways that honor the varying degrees of vulnerability as well as risk tolerance of people in our community of faith.

When we decided to hold two services on Christmas Eve, it seemed sufficient given our Sunday morning attendance and our masking policy. Now that an even more transmissible variant is circulating, we are reconsidering our plans. Unfortunately, our sanctuary size and configuration limits the creative ways we could create distancing (and to implement distancing would drastically reduce capacity). We are unwilling to turn people away from worship if we hit capacity limits. Adding an additional worship at this point, in terms of both logistics and volunteer support, would be difficult.

We ask you and your household to think seriously about your worship plans for Christmas Eve. Here are the ways that we will gather as a community:

Livestream worship at 7:30pm (with prelude music beginning at 7pm) is the safest way to celebrate the birth of Christ. Please seriously consider this option if you are not fully vaccinated, immunocompromised or otherwise vulnerable (or in close contact with someone who is), or experiencing any symptoms of illness.

For those who would like an in-person experience but want to limit their exposure to crowds, we are adding an outdoor option! We will gather near the end of each worship – around 6:15pm and again around 8:15pm – on the front sidewalk by the Christmas Tree (on the corner of Perrin and Church Streets). One of the Pastors will lead this gathering while the other finishes leading worship inside. We will hear the Christmas Gospel, sing a few carols, then the light of Christ will be shared from those worshipping in the sanctuary extending outside. We'll join our voices in singing a candlelit Silent Night, concluding with Joy to the World! We expect this gathering will be brief (15-20 minutes) while providing a meaningful way to worship together safely.

Worship in the sanctuary will still be held at 5:30pm and 7:30pm as originally planned. Worship at 5:30pm will include a Pop-Up Christmas Program. Worship at 7:30pm will begin with prelude music at 7pm, and it will include communion. These in-person, indoor options are safest for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, but they are not without risk. If you would like to worship in-person, we strongly urge you to take a rapid COVID test before coming to church. *Through Monroe County's distribution program, we have free COVID rapid-testing kits available for your use! You may pick one up at church on Wednesday, December 22 from 4:30-6pm and Thursday, December 23, from 12-1:30pm. Drive up by the elevator entrance on Perrin Street and someone will be there to distribute kit(s) for your household.* While a negative test result is not a guarantee, taking this additional precaution may help to limit the spread of the virus. We have also upgraded the ventilation in the sanctuary to improve the air flow, and we continue to require masks at all times in the building.

We long for a world where we can gather freely and without the need to change plans, but our county is in a state of emergency and our healthcare system is overwhelmed. Our world is crying out for healing and hope. Our response – wearing masks, getting vaccinated and/or boosted (if eligible), and prioritizing safety over preference – embodies our faith in the One who commands us to love one another. What better way to celebrate the birth of Jesus!

In hope and expectation,

Pastor Hoffman and Pastor Amy



WORSHIP



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SERVE