

STONE HILL CHURCH – COVID-19 FAQs

OVERVIEW

Where does the church get its information?

Stone Hill Church continues to closely monitor issues related to COVID-19, and we are committed to protecting the welfare of our church family as best we can at this difficult time. We are seeking to carefully respond to guidelines from federal, State, and other sources in a way which is reasonable, sensible and proportionate in a rapidly changing public health landscape.

What do I do if I am alone and afraid?

If you do find yourself afraid and in isolation, please inform us by [contacting the church office](#) (609-924-3816) so the pastoral staff can be in touch during this difficult time so that you don't feel secluded from the church family.

What is the Bible's message during this time?

Many of you are feeling understandably anxious about our current situation and the days that lie ahead. Paul writes: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:6-7).

What can we do?

We must pray for God's mercy on us and on our nation and for those in authority making decisions for our welfare. We must also pray that ultimately God would be glorified as many in our community and nation turn to Christ for salvation.

THE CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT

Some people feel that government regulations related to the pandemic are intruding on the church. What is the position of the elders?

The elders have concluded that God has instituted both the church and human government. When the government issues restrictions that are temporary, measured, and equitable regarding public gatherings, and does so for the purpose of containing a threat to the community at large, the elders believe that the government is functioning within its God-given responsibility.

The elders also recognize the Biblical instructions to us to do good to our community, to love others and to protect the reputation of the gospel.

The elders are encouraged by New Jersey's measured approach to houses of worship:

- When indoor gatherings were restricted to 15 persons, the government expanded this to 100 for houses of worship.
- When outdoor gatherings were restricted to 500 persons, the government placed no restrictions on houses of worship.
- When masks were required for indoor gatherings, the government allowed brief removal of masks for religious purposes
- The government has not issued any directives on how worship is to be conducted.

While the elders recognize the centrality of gathering for worship, given the above considerations, the elders do not feel that we are in a situation where “we must obey God rather than man”.

WORSHIP SERVICES

What worship service opportunities are available?

- An indoor, in-person worship service at 9:30 a.m. (sign-up needed)
- A virtual live-streamed service on YouTube and Facebook at 9:30 a.m.
- An outdoor, in-person worship service at 5:00 p.m. (if inclement weather, sign-up needed for indoor service)
- In addition, the virtual service remains available on YouTube for congregants who cannot participate live.

Why multiple services?

We all long to get back to worship services the way they used to be. Until then, since some individuals are at higher risk or want to protect loved ones who are at higher risk, we are providing different worship opportunities.

- The virtual service provides an opportunity to worship together while protecting those at higher risk.
- The indoor service provides an opportunity to worship together more personally, in a more familiar setting. We’ve taken measures to reduce the risks that are inherent in any indoor group meeting. We will need to wear masks, and, at this time, will not be able to have congregational singing.
- At the outdoor service, because it has a lower risk than an indoor service, we can include congregational singing, and masks can be removed except during the singing.
- For both the indoor and outdoor services we will maintain the distancing recommended by public health authorities.

What should I do if I have a high-risk condition?

Persons with higher-risk conditions ([age >60, certain medical conditions](#)) place themselves and the healthcare system at potentially greater risk when they are in group settings. If you have a high-risk condition, we encourage you to consider participating through the virtual service.

What should I do if I am ill or had a possible exposure to COVID?

- ILL: If you have fever, cough or [other symptoms](#) of possible COVID you should participate in services at home, not in person, and contact your physician.
- EXPOSURE: If you have had a positive test for COVID in the past 10 days, have had [close contact with someone with COVID or COVID-LIKE symptoms](#), or have been instructed to self-isolate or self-quarantine you should participate in services at home, not in person.

Can we safely have congregational singing?

We’re anxious to get back to singing as part of our worship. The question of whether singing produces infectious aerosols is an active area of research. New Jersey does not provide any directives regarding singing. We’ve reviewed the recommendations of professional music and medical organizations, who, perhaps wanting to err on the side of caution, almost uniformly do not recommend singing indoors at this time. We are pressing the pause button until this issue clarifies.

Since singing outdoors allows for greater dispersal of aerosols, there will be congregational singing (with masks) at the outdoor service as long as community transmission rates are not high.

What about communion?

We are in the process of discussing a date for the next communion service. Current public health recommendations are to avoid shared objects as much as possible, so we anticipate that we will be using individually packaged elements.

What about masks?

Since the government has directed that masks will be worn at public indoor gatherings, we will follow this directive.

New Jersey does allow for brief removal of masks for religious purposes. In keeping with this, those who are leading the congregation in prayer or Bible reading will briefly remove their masks for this portion of worship.

New Jersey government leaders have provided tacit acknowledgment that mask removal is sometimes necessary in order to clearly communicate a message. This is seen, for example, in press briefings. The pastor has attempted to preach with a mask and found it distracting from the spiritual message he was given by God to convey. Therefore, the preaching segment of worship will be conducted without a mask. To compensate for this, we have further increased the physical distance of the pastor from the congregation during preaching. The pastor will wear a mask except when he is preaching.

What is the maximum capacity for worship services?

- NJ State directives allow us up to 150 persons in the auditorium.
- NJ State directives do not limit our number for outdoor services as long as appropriate physical distancing is maintained.

Why do we have to sign up for indoor services?

Sign-ups are necessary because:

- New Jersey has directed houses of worship to limit indoor gatherings to 150 persons. Sign-ups allow us to stay within this guidance.
- There are some churches which have become a venue for the spread of the virus. While we are taking precautions to make this very unlikely at Stone Hill, it is possible that there will be an individual (or several individuals) who may be positive for the virus after attending a worship service. Having a sign-up list facilitates notifying congregants of a possible exposure. Our intention is to keep this list confidential, and to destroy the list after the 14-day incubation period. In the unlikely event of a church-related outbreak, Stone Hill Church will cooperate with public health officials in attempting to contain the outbreak, including sharing the names of attendees with officials when ordered by the Princeton Health Department.

What about the Atrium?

The opportunity to gather and chat is an important part of building community. We are exploring how to safely gather. The Atrium is on "pause" right now.

YOUTH

What will our youth ministry look like?

This fall, there are four main ways youth can connect at Stone Hill Church.

1. We will be meeting in person for Friday night youth group, starting Friday September 18th. This will be at 6:00 p.m. for Middle School and 7:30 p.m. for High School, and based in Harris Hall and the 1st-2nd grade classroom.
2. We will be holding a Sunday afternoon virtual hangout on Zoom every Sunday at 12 p.m., starting on Sunday September 20th, for all ages between 6th – 12th grade.
3. We are encouraging families to sign up to join a family discipleship pod, where they will be grouped together with 2-3 other families and given a set of discussion questions appropriate for the whole family based on the Sunday sermon. They will meet weekly and go through those questions in their pods, in place of traditional Sunday school. We have both virtual pods and in person pods. You can sign up [here](#).
4. We are also seeking to provide one to one mentoring for any youth ministry student who is interested during this difficult time. This can be in person or virtual. For more information about mentoring for boys, contact [Michael Sentance](#) and for more information on mentoring for girls, contact [Becca Gater](#).

If you would like any other information, or have any questions or concerns about any of this, please feel free to reach out to [Michael Sentance](#).

CHILDREN

Will we have Sunday School in the fall?

Please see Lindsei Lansky Luciano's [letter to parents](#).

PRECAUTIONS

What health precautions will the church be taking?

- Physical distancing
- Face coverings
- Hand hygiene
- Cleaning & disinfecting
- Ventilation
- Minimize shared objects
- Asking those who are ill or quarantinable to participate from home

MORE INFORMATION

What should I do if I have questions that aren't answered here?

Contact [Doug Megill](#) or [Jim Erickson](#).