

Return to Worship: June 2021 Edition

Grace Lutheran Church

Just as the chill winds of early May lead to the warm breezes of June, we're continuing to make progress toward everyone's goal of resuming some semblance of normalcy at Grace. To everything there is a season, and our season of Grace grows ever closer.



But the Return to Worship team is always conscious of our charge to take into consideration the vulnerability of our congregation's members, especially those who are yet to receive their vaccinations. We also want to faithfully follow the guidance of the Allegheny Synod, and to be good citizens of State College Borough.

Balancing all these sometimes-competing needs is not always easy, and we know our recommendations will not always please everyone. Once again, we humbly ask for your patience and understanding, just as we want to assure you our ultimate goal is to no longer be needed as a team.

With that in mind, the Return to Worship team, in consultation with the pastors, has planned a return to our "normal" worship times of 8 a.m., 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., starting with the June 6th services. Specifically:

8 a.m.: The parking lot service will be retired; instead, the 8 a.m. service will return indoors to the Sanctuary, with limited seating of 60; masking will continue, following the recommendations of the Allegheny Synod and the Borough of State College's mask mandate.

9 a.m.: While we will still ask those attending this service to maintain distance between family groups, we will no longer require masks! The exception is during singing, since singing greatly increases virus spread. Also, while up to now we've asked worshippers to bring their own chairs to this service, we recognize not everyone is able to do that. Folding chairs will be available for anyone who wants or needs one. The nature of this service requires it continue to be weather-dependent, with the decision made by 8 p.m. Saturday evening. The decision to cancel will be publicized on Grace's Facebook page and on the website. Access to the courtyard will continue to be through the Miller Center or from the Beaver Avenue sidewalk.

10:30: Capacity at the 10:30 service will increase to 80. As with the 8 a.m. service, we will ask that congregants continue to mask.

In addition to these changes, we are also no longer designating specific seats for those attending the indoor services. Parishioners may seat themselves in any of the pews marked with bows and will determine for themselves what is a comfortable distance between family units. And, there are plans to expand Communion at all three services by offering wine/juice in addition to the wafer.

Because we are still limiting seating at the indoor services, we ask that those wanting to attend at 8 or 10:30 register using the Sign-Up Genius links for their chosen service, available through E-Notes and the website; the deadline to do so has been extended to 3 p.m. the Thursday prior to

the service. Those who are not able to use Sign-Up Genius are encouraged to call the church office to register; please do so by the 3 p.m. Thursday deadline.

Finally, singing. The Return to Worship team is well aware many of our Grace family are anxious to return to a service rich in song. However, we are equally aware that our younger members only now have the opportunity to protect themselves through vaccination and are still vulnerable, as are others in our midst. Church singing has been linked to too many devastating super-spreader events and even masks do not offer adequate protection indoors. We ask that you continue to be patient as we wait a bit longer to welcome back this beloved aspect of our Sanctuary worship. In the meantime, rest assured that the 8 and 10:30 services will be filled with music from our organist and from the pastors and cantor, who will sing while masked and behind Plexiglas.

As always, we are grateful for the support and understanding you have given the pastoral staff and the team as we try to walk this unblazed trail together. We're excited about the progress we're making, but know that for many, it isn't enough. While our pace may seem slow, our goal is to keep moving steadily forward, protecting those who cannot protect themselves while also providing as meaningful a worship experience as possible. Please continue to let us know where we can improve and, just as important, what makes you happy.

We're coming back. Together.

The Return to Worship Team