

To the congregation of First Presbyterian Woodburn,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ and from the elders and pastor of First Presbyterian Church. We hope you are well and not only surviving in this pandemic, but finding ways to thrive in this extraordinarily trying time.

All of us have been on a roller coaster these past months as we have tried to adapt to living in the shadow of Covid-19. The entire country, the entire world, has been forced to change, as has our church. Now that some openings have started, the question is whether we can open, too. Our short answer is "No."

This is a decision made with the best care the Session had. None of us are experts or have a crystal ball to tell us what to do. So, in an attempt to be as faithful to the Gospel and the latest scientific evidence as possible, a reopening research team was assembled. Mike Hachquet, Rev. Kathy Erion, Scott Thompson (Aurora Presbyterian Church) and Rev. Cynthia O'Brien have been spending many hours studying a great deal of material from diverse sources in order to make an informed recommendation. Their recommendation was unanimous. Because we trust the integrity and ability of these people, the Session has accepted their counsel. We consider it to be Biblically sound. For now, we anticipate holding only online worship services *at least* through the summer. The building will remain closed to all public gatherings, including those of renters, with the exception of the essential Meals on Wheels program. The committee will stay on the job and meet often. We will continue to share additional information as available to keep the congregation up to date.

In the meantime, we want to assure you we have never stopped being the church and will keep on looking for opportunities to turn this current challenge into a blessing. We have continued to worship, care for each other and serve our neighbors. Our Sunday service team creates online services each week that reach most of our regular attenders including many people beyond our church. In fact, our attendance has increased! We are staying in touch with each other through video conferences, phone calls, postal mail and driveway visits. Our ministries to those in need continue through Meals on Wheels, Love INC and Family Building Blocks. Your faithful and generous giving helps us continue sharing God's love at a time when it is most needed.

We are always looking for new ways to "turn lemons into lemonade!" If you have ideas, or would like to hold virtual gatherings, just let us know. This is a God given opportunity to be creative in ways to fellowship, grow in our faith and serve others.

May we continue to tell God's story of unwavering and unconquerable love in our faithful and creative response to these challenging times.

Rev. Cynthia O'Brien, Mike Hachquet, Lucien Klein, Sally Klein, Julie Moore, Nancy Piper, Johanna Samson, Marcy Sterling, Paula Wolcott

For further reading:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gsiD3kLMhxtE68wXlt4Z-aSF-kCYvdcQ/view>

<https://mailchi.mp/dee3db97e944/planning-for-the-future>

<https://www.cascadespresbytery.org/when-will-things-open-up-again/>

<https://www.post-gazette.com/news/faith-religion/2020/05/15/How-can-worshippers-keep-from-singing-They-may-have-to/stories/202005120043>

<https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2020/may/13/ringgold-church-now-linked-three-covid-19-cas/522858/>

<https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/i-would-do-anything-for-a-do-over-calgary-church-hopes-others-learn-from-their-tragic-covid-19-experience-1.4933461>

Special thanks to the Presbytery of The Cascades, First Presbyterian Church of Bend and other entities for sharing resources that have helped us in our study.

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