

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHESTNUT HILL

September 8, 2020

John Wilkinson, Pastor
jwilkinson@chestnuthillpres.org

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill,

*“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”*
~Jeremiah 29:11

When your Session determined to cancel in-person worship in the Sanctuary on March 15, little did we know the extent and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this vision – *a future filled with hope* – would be transformed over time. Now, some six months later and counting, our church, nation and world have experienced so much. We have mourned the deaths of more than 185,000 Americans and the infection of millions. We have learned terms like “social distancing” and “flatten the curve,” and the importance of wearing masks. We have readjusted our lives – working from home, remote learning, closed restaurants, limited shopping and travel.

At PCCH, we have continued in ministry with various smaller online group gatherings and worship and study opportunities. Foremost, we have continued to offer what we hope has been creative and engaging online worship each Sunday – special thanks to all who have worked so hard to make it happen and who have adapted to this new reality with grace and skill. Thanks as well to all of you for your ongoing support, including your financial support.

Though the coronavirus’ transmission continues, and though the availability of a vaccine remains a future goal, we have learned a great deal about how to protect ourselves and stay safe. However, large indoor gatherings such as all-congregation indoor in-person worship present a risk for increasing spread of COVID-19 plus, to limit worship participation in any way does not feel inclusive or welcoming and to curtail hymn singing and limit conversation does not cultivate the genuine sense of community we seek.

With that in mind, your Session, after considered and prayerful deliberation and based on a thorough process developed by the Return to Church team, has determined that *we are not yet ready* to return to in-person worship until at the earliest the second Sunday of Advent, December 6. Until then, we will introduce an enhanced set of ministry offerings, some online and some held in a large outdoor tent located in our parking lot.

Two values have been paramount in our discussions – the health and safety of all of our members, youngest to oldest and most vulnerable, and our unique identity as an inclusive community of faith. With you, we understand the fluid and changing nature of the pandemic. Even as we make plans, we know that we will need to be flexible, adaptable and creative. We are in this together – thanks for your forbearance and prayers.

Some affirmations made along the way have helped to guide our thinking. Perhaps they will resonate with you:

- People want to be together, and at the same time understand the need to wait until some level of health/safety is established
- This is hard and the road ahead is often unclear
- Online worship has been a positive experience, even with its limitations
- Other online programming is effective
- We have the opportunity in the Fall to build new ways of connecting, even if not fully back in the sanctuary/building
- Our financial picture is relatively healthy
- We seek to model the neighborly love of Jesus

OUR PLANS

WORSHIP

We will continue with recorded worship online, at least through the second Sunday of Advent, available at the top of our website homepage. Beginning on September 13, we will record greater portions of each service in the sanctuary. We will also include pieces by choral quartets and organ voluntaries offered by Ken Lovett.

We will also open the sanctuary for designated periods for people to sit and pray. Stay tuned for details.

THE BIG TENT

We have installed a rented 70' x 30' foot tent in our parking lot that will be able to accommodate – safely and socially distanced – groups of varying sizes for live, in-person gatherings. See the enclosed flyer for a partial listing of opportunities. Some will require an RSVP and ALL will require masks and social distancing. This will be one way for us to connect in person. We will use the tent for evening prayer, youth activities, small groups – anything we can possibly imagine! If you have program ideas, or simply want to use the tent to gather with church friends, let us know.

EDUCATION and NURTURE

Children – The children of PCCH have become experts on Zoom, often teaching Austin a few new things about technology during our Friday lunches and Vacation Bible School over these last six months. For the Fall, we will be moving into a new season in which we will offer Church School much in the way we have been offering worship online each week, posted by 9:30 a.m. each Sunday morning and then available online. Families with children ages birth – fifth grade will be receiving a Worship-at-Home resource bag, which includes the *Growing in God's Love* storybook Bible edited by Carol Wehrheim and Elizabeth Caldwell. The bag will also be filled with other resources that will guide children to set up a space for worship each week and to get into the good habit of incorporating faith formation practices into their everyday lives at home. Best of all, you do not have to be a child to participate! Church members who are young at heart

are invited to participate in our church school lessons, to experience again the stories of our faith through the eyes of a child, and to wonder along with us about the ways these ancient stories intersect with and guide our lives today. Then stay tuned to sing along with Julie Snyder as she continues to teach our children through song and to prepare them to lead us in worship.

Youth – The youth have been meeting regularly since the pandemic began, first online and more recently in-person, observing all health and safety protocols. We will continue to meet in person, gathering outdoors at the church and utilizing the big tent. We will engage in discussions, devotions, service projects, and when the weather is agreeable, short hikes in and around the Wissahickon. Even though “normal” will have to be put on hold for a little bit longer, we look forward to enjoying each other’s company, dialogue, and friendship.

Second Hour Online – We will continue with Second Hour online offerings, via Zoom, beginning September 13. Watch for the link and see the schedule on the attached flyer. We will also add some midweek and weekend offerings, utilizing both the tent and online capabilities.

OTHER STEPS

- We are proceeding with the installation of equipment in the Sanctuary and Widener Hall that will allow for live streaming of worship and other events. This development will greatly enhance our ministry both during and after COVID.
- We are installing touchless faucets and towel dispensers in our restrooms and MERV 13 filters to enhance air safety and hygiene, as well as hand sanitizer stations throughout the building.
- We will continue to consult with and support the Center on the Hill and the Preschool as they make return plans.

CONGREGATIONAL and PASTORAL CARE

We are recruiting a volunteer “tech team” to work with our members who currently lack the equipment or technology knowledge to access online worship. We will work with you to help secure Wi-Fi if needed and then equip you with a simple device that will allow you to connect online. Please be in touch with me if you’d like assistance – we want to make everything as “user friendly” as possible.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Brian, Austin or me if you have any pastoral needs, or know of someone who does.

FINANCES and STEWARDSHIP

Our overall financial position remains very much the same as was communicated in the previous congregational letter in the mid-summer. The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan we applied for and received in April is on track to meet all necessary requirements to be forgiven, and that has given us flexibility to continue virtual programming, maintain payrolls and plan for a return to church despite the adverse impacts to our building usage fees and, to a lesser extent, some ongoing shortfalls in 2020 pledge receipts. While we perennially experience dips in our

congregational pledge response during the summer months, we are a bit behind where we have been in prior years by late August; to that end, please be sure to keep your pledges up to date as much as possible so we can set ourselves up for success this fall and when we hopefully return to more "normal" programming and worship!

Your Stewardship Committee has never planned a stewardship campaign during a global pandemic! Nevertheless, we've discerned a 2021 theme – "*Walking in Faith*" – that highlights the many ways we are called to be the church even we are unable to gather and the path forward is unclear. Thank you for your 2020 support; stay tuned for details of our 2021 effort.

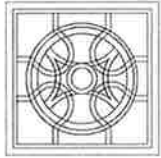
The Return to Church Team (Rebecca Bernstein, *convener*, Jane Kaufman, Laura Brobyn, Dan Pretz, Lisa Guyer, Kristin Lawton, Taylor Slaughter and John Wilkinson) will continue to meet and welcomes others to join us as the tasks continue to unfold. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with a member of the team with questions, concerns or program ideas that will enhance communication, engagement and connection.

In the meantime, keep the church and its ministry in your prayers, along with our broader community and nation, as we face a pandemic and social and political challenges that make our faith – and the community of faith that calls us in and sends us out – all the more vital.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wilkinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

John Wilkinson



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHESTNUT HILL

SEPTEMBER 2020 @ PCCH

- **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9**
 - 12:00 noon Bible Study (Facebook Live)
- **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11**
 - 7:30 a.m. Morning Prayer (Facebook Live), with prayers to remember the events of September 11, 2001
- **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13**
 - 9:30 a.m. Children's Church School (PCCH website)
 - 10:00 a.m. Worship (PCCH website), John Wilkinson preaching
 - 11:00 a.m. Second Hour Live (on Zoom), Rachel Falkove, PIHN
 - 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Ice Cream Social (Distanced) at the church
 - Drop-in/drive-thru are welcome (and we will have chairs set up under the tent if you'd like to stay for a socially distanced visit), but it would help us if you let us know you're planning to stop by – email ecarpenter@chestnuthillpres.org or call 215.247.8855.
 - Families with children ages birth – 5th grade are invited to pick up your Worship-at-Home resource bag from the outdoor tent gathering.
 - We will be receiving food donations to support the Germantown Avenue Crisis Ministry
 - 5:00 p.m. – Evening Prayer Service – at the church, RSVP to ecarpenter@chestnuthillpres.org or 215.247.8855
- **TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15**
 - 7:30 p.m. Theology on Tap (via Zoom)
- **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16**
 - 12:00 noon Bible Study (Facebook Live)
 - 7:30 p.m. PCCH Book Club, "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehesi Coates (on Zoom)
- **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18**
 - 7:30 a.m. Morning Prayer (Facebook Live)
- **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20**
 - 9:30 a.m. Children's Church School (PCCH website)
 - 10:00 a.m. Worship (PCCH website), John Wilkinson preaching
 - 11:00 a.m. Second Hour Live (on Zoom), Bryan Miller, Heeding God's Call
- **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23**
 - 12:00 noon Bible Study (Facebook Live)

- **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25**
 - 7:30 a.m. Morning Prayer (Facebook Live)
- **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27**
 - 9:30 a.m. Children’s Church School (PCCH website)
 - 10:00 a.m. Worship (PCCH website), Kevin Porter, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Philadelphia, Guest Preacher
 - 11:00 a.m. Second Hour Live (on Zoom), Mary Kay Meeks-Hank, Face to Face
 - 5:00 p.m. Evening Prayer Service – at the church, RSVP to ecarpenter@chestnuthillpres.org or 215.247.8855

Children/families – The children of PCCH have become experts at Zoom! They even teach Austin a thing or two every lunchtime session we’ve been spending together (virtually) on Fridays. They’ve been working hard on sending letters and notes to seniors who may be isolated at this time. Children are welcome to attend the evening prayer service where they can write a note or draw a picture for one of our senior members. We invite those who haven’t yet picked up their Worship-at-Home resource bag to do so at this time. Online Church School begins on September 13, ready to view by 9:30 a.m.

Youth – The youth have been meeting regularly since the pandemic began, first online and more recently in-person. We will continue to meet in person, gathering outdoors at the church and utilizing the big tent. We will engage in discussions, devotions, service projects, and when the weather is agreeable, short hikes in and around the Wissahickon. Even though “normal” will have to be put on hold for a little bit longer, we look forward to enjoying each other’s company, dialogue, and friendship.

Virtual Gallery —the Music and Arts committee is delighted to present the third in our series of virtual art exhibitions, titled “What I Did on My Summer Vacation.” The exhibit should be live by September 13 —watch for the announcement! To see it and the previous exhibitions, visit the church's website and check under Music and Arts.

Our next themed exhibition is a celebration of our annual Homecoming Sunday—we invite you to share your September smiles with our church family via the PCCH online gallery. Send us a selfie featuring your face in your favorite place! It’s a super simple way to reconnect with your PCCH pals. Please send your photos by September 24 to pcchvirtualgallery@gmail.com.

Center on the Hill – New Online Programming continues Monday – Friday at 12:00 Noon in September on our programs page: <https://www.chestnuthillpres.org/center-on-the-hill/programs/>

Special Online Events: Behavioral Expressions Seminar, Wednesday, September 30, 10:30am- 11:30am and Let's Move: Mind, Body, Balance for Seniors in the Era of COVID-19, Thursday October 1, 1:00pm- 2:30pm