

Good afternoon,

Over the last couple of weeks the percentage of persons testing positive for COVID-19 in South Carolina has decreased to 4.2%. The CDC states that the community spread is under control if the percent positive is under 5%. (See the article from the Herald here - <https://www.heraldonline.com/news/coronavirus/article249743758.html>). Although the percent positive rate is trending favorably at this time, it is projected that another spike may hit the US in the coming weeks.

In addition to the decrease in the present the percent positive in our area, vaccine availability has opened to the point where the majority of our in-person worship attendees have received at least one vaccine if not both doses:

- Over 50% of in-person worship attendees have already received both vaccine doses.
- Over 75% of in-person worship attendees are projected to receive both vaccine doses by mid-April.

We are on a great path towards returning to a more normal worship experience! Thank you to everyone for your efforts in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Although we are anxious to return to what was before COVID a year ago, we must take a measured approach. At this time, it is recommended by the CDC that we continue wearing masks and maintain social distance protocols until 100% of our adult congregation has been vaccinated. However, with a decrease in the percent positive in our community and the increase in individuals receiving vaccines, I have spent some time thinking about a gradual return to singing and other activities as a church. This is my initial proposal and is subject to change based on the input of our Church Council:

1. Beginning this week, 3/14/21, we can have soloist or duets leading special music in worship. Soloists/duets can sing without a mask but should wear a mask at all other times in worship.
2. Return to congregational singing while wearing masks on Easter Sunday 4/4/21.
3. Look into when choir can sing and when choir practices can resume.
4. Return to offering kids and children's activities as soon as possible.
5. Continue to monitor the CDC's guidelines for mask wearing, social distancing and singing as we move forward in making the best decisions for our church family. The hope will be that the entire congregation would have the vaccine by the end of May, the percent positive will remain below 5% and that all other indicators would lead us to move back to normal worship as the congregation is ready.