

# Abundance of Life in the Body of Christ

A 4 Step Journey to Returning from a Season of Separation  
for Spring Hill Presbyterian Church  
Mobile, Alabama



*“Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”*

*--1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 14-27*

## Part 1: Introduction, Research, and Monitoring

During this time of separation, we long to be together. We wonder, “When can we gather in person again? What will gathering look like?” In hopes of a safe return, Spring Hill Presbyterian Church will be taking our cues from information about the COVID-19 virus, health science recommendations, and our particular context and calling. We continue to learn more each day from public health scientists about transmission, protection, and safe gathering practices and when they will become possible again. As Christians, with God we prioritize the health and wellness of all God’s people, sharing Jesus’ special concern for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. Jesus said, **“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10). Likewise, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are together the body of Christ and that such unity has implications for how we care for all members together, particularly those who are endangered. Each member needs the other, and all are essential for the body to thrive: **“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.”** (1 Corinthians 12:26). Joining in Christ’s mission, we are aware and concerned about abundant life for all, especially mitigating the risk for those who are most susceptible to this virus in our church family.

We also affirm the church is not the building, or even gathering in person. The church is the people of God loving in the way of Jesus. Spring Hill Presbyterian is not “closed”--the church has never been closed because all of us are the body of Christ united wherever we are. Until there is a minimal rate of infection, a coronavirus cure, or a vaccine, gatherings of the congregation will be very different than what we are accustomed to. This four-step plan shares what we know, what we reasonably expect, and how we will be guided in decision-making about return to in-person activity at Spring Hill Presbyterian Church.

As we prepare this four-step plan, we are continuing to survey current data on community and state prevalence and spread of the virus, and recommendations from city, county, state and national leaders. Some of the resources we are using to guide our recommendations to the Session are listed below:

### Scientific Sources:

To see the Mobile County Health Department cases and characteristics of patients:  
[http://mchd.org/General/Bulk\\_Documents.aspx?type=News&index=3&subindex=1](http://mchd.org/General/Bulk_Documents.aspx?type=News&index=3&subindex=1)

To see frequently updated analysis of cases in Alabama:  
<https://alpublichealth.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/6d2771faa9da4a2786a509d82c8cf0f7>

To see general information about COVID-19 in Alabama: <https://covid19.alabama.gov/>  
<https://alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/assets/cov-sah-worship.pdf>

To see information about COVID-19 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov>  
<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/index.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

## Other Resources that the Coronavirus Commission Found Helpful:

To see resources provided by the Presbyterian Church (USA) related to COVID-19:

<https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>

To see the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta's recommendations about multi-phased reopening options and additional resources for churches:

<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/COVID-19--Letter---Reopening-to-Reimagining-Task-Force.html?soid=1011272361012&aid=hH6lDPiZQk8>

To see resources and information provided by our congregation's insurance carrier, The Insurance Board:

<https://www.insuranceboard.org/covid-19-resources/>  
<https://www.insuranceboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-19-Reopen-Your-Church.pdf>

To see how Covid-19 spreads: <https://erinbromage.wixsite.com/covid19/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>

To see questions for churches to consider in returning:

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

To see the Presbyterian Association of Musician's response to COVID-19:

[https://mcusercontent.com/a3dbe38b4373524677890d5cf/files/0344e4cf-5849-4453-bbd5-c860f7b63653/PAM\\_Covid\\_Response\\_1\\_.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/a3dbe38b4373524677890d5cf/files/0344e4cf-5849-4453-bbd5-c860f7b63653/PAM_Covid_Response_1_.pdf)

As of May 21, 2020, there continues to be considerable spread of the virus in our city, county and state. The rate of confirmed Covid-19 cases continues to rise in our county and state. Mobile County has the highest number of confirmed cases and the highest number of deaths related to Covid-19 in the state. The effects of the Alabama "Safer At Home" state law (effective on May 8, 2020) are unknown. We are unclear at this time if cases will be on the rise in cases or if mitigation of the virus will continue. We will continue to monitor the reported data (see resources above) as we make recommendations to the Session regarding a phased reopening of church property and church gatherings.

**Part 2** of this document includes a Four Step plan for returning when external benchmarks are met and what each step will entail for different areas of ministry.

**Part 3** discusses matters specific to singing and worship.

If you would like to provide feedback or volunteer to help with implementing this plan, please contact the SHPC Coronavirus Commission by using the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeyz1WqCV3Cn-FQHvP5Tdog8e7h4iteBLYXsdlbmndDWaYzEQ/viewform>



**Part 2: A Multi-phased Return Plan in Four Steps**

The table below follows steps of implementation that need to be considered as we think about the many activities in which our church is engaged. This chart provides an approximation of changes in activities based on our current COVID-19 status. “At the same time, there will be other things we will learn along the way that we will want to continue, adapt, or even expand as we return from this time of wilderness or exile. These important insights may be signs of a new thing God is doing among us.” [Presbyterian Church (USA)]

CHURCH CATEGORY	STEP ONE: While COVID-19 cases are still increasing (Began with Session Vote on March 17)	STEP TWO: When rates of infection in our community have begun to decline or plateau.	STEP THREE: When there is a sustained decline in new cases.	STEP FOUR: When COVID-19 treatment or a vaccine is available.
<p><b>Building preparation; sanitizing, cleaning.</b></p>	<p><u>During lockdown:</u> Sanitize all church buildings, classrooms, sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, hallways, conference rooms, bathrooms. (External Cleaning Service)</p>	<p><u>Ongoing cleaning:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider using outside spaces on church property for some church groups to meet initially.</li> <li>• Wipe down any chairs used outdoors after meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain increased sanitation/cleaning and hygiene measures in all areas of church usage.</li> <li>• Consider recruiting congregational assistance for cleaning areas following worship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain increased sanitation/cleaning and hygiene measures in all areas of church usage.</li> <li>• Consider continued congregational assistance for cleaning areas following worship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Worship</b></p> <p><b>** See Part 3 of this document: Singing and Worshipping Together During COVID-19</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All worship services are virtual.</li> <li>• Staff models 6-ft. distancing and fewer than 10 people in the sanctuary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue virtual Sunday morning worship as primary church-wide worship.</li> <li>• Create a supplemental evening outdoor prayer service in person for congregation members who are not in high-risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a process for ensuring that a limited number of people gather for worship at one time.</li> <li>• Consider shortened worship service and repeated worship in various areas (Bullard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow worship with expanded attendance at church; but virtual opportunities may continue in addition. Determine whether physical distancing and masks are still advisable.</li> </ul>

CHURCH CATEGORY	STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	STEP FOUR
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Worship (continued)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>** See Part 3 of this document: Singing and Worshiping Together During COVID-19</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graveside memorial services held outside in Memorial Garden for groups of 10 or less</li> </ul>	<p>groups to gather.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendees bring their own chairs or blanket for sitting on the ground.</li> <li>• Practice social distancing</li> </ul>	<p>Building, Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for 6-ft. of distancing between family groups, and all wear masks.</li> <li>• Modify some tasks for beadle, crucifer, liturgist, and children’s sermon for safety reasons.</li> <li>• Place offering plates in designated places, but not passed.</li> <li>• The congregation will not be involved in communal speaking or singing.</li> <li>• Communion served virtually at another time.</li> <li>• Children remain with families – no childcare.</li> <li>• Plan for orderly dismissal of the congregation after worship to maintain social distancing. (Row by row)</li> <li>• Continue video streaming of worship for those who remain at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to all other Step Three constraints will depend on newly emerging treatments or a vaccine, or other break-throughs or discoveries.</li> <li>• Explore changes to in-person communion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Limit those coming into contact with the communion elements as they are prepared.</li> <li>○ Ask servers to sanitize their hands in view of the congregation before serving.</li> <li>○ Let the bread be given by the server.</li> <li>○ Use small cups of juice spaced apart and provide a place where used cups may be placed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CHURCH CATEGORY	STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	STEP FOUR
<p align="center"><b>Music</b>  <b>** See Part 3 of this document: Singing and Worshiping Together During COVID-19</b></p>	<p>Instrumental music and a single cantor lead at-home singing during virtual worship.</p>	<p>For outdoor worship, include music as appropriate and safe.</p>	<p>Instrumental music continues. No choir or congregational singing. Model safe and healthy behaviors.</p>	<p>Gradual return to choir and congregational singing, use of handbells, etc.</p>
<p align="center"><b>Sunday School, Bible Studies, PW, Circles, Tuesday Breakfast, VBS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All small groups meet via Zoom or YouTube.</li> <li>• VBS lessons recorded in advance and uploaded for at-home participation.</li> <li>• Conduct Faith &amp; Arts Summer Sunday School class on Zoom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Study continues virtually.</li> <li>• PW Coordinating Team meetings are held virtually, or business conducted via e-mail.</li> <li>• No gatherings with church-prepared food (such as Breakfast Bible Study)</li> <li>• Explore outdoor opportunities for small groups to meet while socially distancing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore options for providing Sunday School virtually for all ages, or onsite with distancing, if possible.</li> <li>• Provide “hybrid” approach for virtual participation along with in-person</li> <li>• Bible Study, Circles, and PW CT meetings continue virtually, or onsite with distancing and masks.</li> <li>• No gatherings with church-prepared food (such as Breakfast Bible Study)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible return to more traditional in-person approaches to all small group gatherings.</li> <li>• Model safe and healthy behaviors.</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b>Session, Diaconate, Committee Meetings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All leadership and committee groups meet via Zoom or correspond via e-mail.</li> <li>• Property Committee oversees professional repairs and/or individuals working on the property.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All leadership and committee groups meet via Zoom or correspond via e-mail.</li> <li>• Consider socially distancing Yeomen Work Days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Options include meeting via Zoom or onsite with distancing and masks.</li> <li>• Develop hybrid models for both in-person and off-site attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible return to more traditional in-person approaches to all leadership gatherings.</li> <li>• Model safe and healthy behaviors.</li> </ul>

CHURCH CATEGORY	STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	STEP FOUR
<b>Fellowship; Supper Clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No onsite meetings at church.</li> <li>Encourage outreach among members of the congregation via phone calls, e-mails, written notes and cards, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage outreach among members of the congregation via phone calls, e-mails, written notes and cards, etc.</li> <li>Explore small group, outdoor, social distancing possibilities—including members bringing their own food and tailgating.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspend “meet &amp; greet” time before/after worship.</li> <li>Provide suggestions for how members might engage with those who are struggling with illness, isolation, or loss of income.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gradual return to in-person fellowship at church, Supper Clubs, other celebrations that involve gathering together.</li> <li>Model safe and healthy behaviors.</li> </ul>
<b>External Organizations using our Buildings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact leadership of external organizations to determine which are able to continue virtually on their own for now. (AA, PRISM United, Boy Scouts)</li> <li>Implement May “rolling awards” ceremonies for Pre-School and Mobile’s Singing Children.</li> <li>Explore options for use of outdoor space on church property for some groups.</li> <li>Girl Scouts and Mobile Art Association on hiatus for summer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use outside spaces on church property for some external groups to meet initially. Wipe down any chairs used outdoors afterwards.</li> <li>Spring Hill Weekday School and Goodwill/Easter Seals Child Development Center permitted to return to limited operation following childcare/school guidelines and wiping down all surfaces of the building used.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain size limits for each group determined by the church</li> <li>Ask outside groups to clean/sanitize any indoor spaces used for meetings before they leave the building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gradual return to in-person meetings using church buildings.</li> <li>Model safe and healthy behaviors.</li> </ul>

CHURCH CATEGORY	STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	STEP FOUR
<b>Church Finances; Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide options to continue giving online or by mailing in offerings. Remind the congregation during virtual worship services.</li> <li>• Minimal office hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide options to continue giving online or by mailing in offerings. Remind the congregation during virtual worship services.</li> <li>• Slowly increase office hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a plan for reducing church expenses if church offerings don't hold steady due to financial set-backs of members.</li> <li>• Staff can resume work in offices, wear masks when interacting with others, continue distancing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit church budget as needed.</li> <li>• Prioritize staff positions and salaries.</li> </ul>
<b>Pastoral Care, Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weddings and funerals held at the church restricted to 10 or fewer people.</li> <li>• Delay baptisms at this step if possible.</li> <li>• Reach out to ill or hospitalized virtually, if possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weddings and funerals held inside church restricted to 10 or fewer people.</li> <li>• Explore outdoor space options for weddings or funerals larger than 10 people</li> <li>• Delay baptisms at this step if possible.</li> <li>• Reach out to ill or hospitalized virtually, if possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit attendance inside church facilities at weddings/funerals.</li> <li>• Continue outdoor weddings/funerals.</li> <li>• Organize small groups within the congregation to connect with those who live alone, have suffered loss and grief, or are less comfortable with technology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gradual return to weddings, funerals, and baptisms, as before.</li> <li>• Pastoral care continues as safety and health issues permit.</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual/Digital Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore virtual options and consult with other churches to share information.</li> <li>• Try new approaches and learn from experience.</li> </ul>	Consider whether to invest in new digital equipment or adopt a new position of digital leadership within the congregation.	Determine which church events might continue virtually either in lieu of, or in addition to traditional modes. For example, continue with both in-person and online worship as an option.	"This time of reentry presents a chance to nurture new habits of Christian faith, life, and worship. Don't miss the opportunity for intentional reflection and deliberate action!"



### Part 3: Singing and Worshiping Together During COVID-19

Singing, by the congregation and by choirs, is an important part of the worship of Spring Hill Presbyterian Church. It is hard to conceive of gathering for in-person worship without singing. It is hard to imagine not being able to have our weekly rehearsals of children's choirs and adult choir. Thus, it is painful for us to hear the science asserting that singing is a particularly dangerous activity – that singers, even asymptomatic, when singing in a group, can be super-spreaders of Coronavirus.

Singing is dangerous because, when singing, we project the virus energetically, spreading it farther than through normal speech. Singing's deep breathing pulls the virus into the body, gathers an intense concentration of virus-carrying droplets, and expels it into the air, making it dangerous not only for uninfected singers in proximity to an infected singer, but for everyone within reach of the droplets and aerosolized virus. Singing a hymn together in worship can be likened to having everyone in the congregation coughing for 3 minutes straight.

Medical experts contend that there is currently no way to safely sing together in groups until a vaccine and/or effective treatment is available. Neither spacing of singers nor wearing of masks can alleviate the risk, especially given the undeniable reality of asymptomatic transmission. No age group is immune from this risk. Though children are usually considered at lower risk than 60+ adults, children can also have underlying health conditions, making them vulnerable--- and children can transmit the virus to vulnerable family members, such as parents, grandparents, and others of any age with whom they come into contact.

Though speaking together in unison is less risky than singing, it too is an activity that intensifies the possible projection of virus-carrying droplets through the congregation, falling on pews and hymnals, and carried by air currents through the room into contact with fellow worshippers. Studies show that masks do not trap all the droplets. Even praying *The Lord's Prayer* out loud together is risky.

You may have noticed that, in our online worship services, we are very intentional about safety of the worship leaders, following these protocols:

- We limit our participants:
  - o Pastor(s), one singer, organist, sound/video technician, instrumentalist (on occasion)
- There is only one singer
- Each person is separated by more than 6'
- Each person works within their own space--- no two people share the same podium, music stand, or space.

In a widely-viewed May 5 webinar- “What Do Science and Data Say About the Near-Future of Singing?” one of the physicians was asked “Can you imagine any way that groups of people can safely sing together before a vaccine and/or effective treatment is developed?” Her answer was very specific; the only way singing in a group can be presumed to be safe is:

- Takes place out of doors
- Limit of four singers, spaced at least 6’ apart
- Singers wear masks
- The wind is blowing into the singers’ backs and not from the front, sides, and does not change directions.

Obviously, these parameters are not consistent with singing by a congregation in a worship space or by a choir in a rehearsal room.

Here are references that inform us regarding singing as a congregation and as choirs:

- Webinar (May 5, 2020) *What Science and Data Say about the Near-Future of Singing*, with medical experts, sponsored by the American Choral Directors Association, National Teachers of Singing, Chorus America, Barbershop Harmony Society, and the Performing Arts Medical Association. The recording may be accessed at: <https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic/> (it begins about 6 minutes into the recording.)

- o One summary of the webinar:

- <https://www.middleclassartist.com/post/nats-panel-of-experts-lays-out-sobering-future-for-singers-no-vaccine-no-safe-public-singing>

- § <https://www.middleclassartist.com/post/nats-panel-of-experts-lays-out-sobering-future-for-singers-no-vaccine-no-safe-public-singing>

- A document presenting general information about how COVID-19 spreads, with a section entitled “Choirs.”

- [https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them?fbclid=IwAR2hlm3DwPgtAqFJpXpxgKxu1YLafIHcCYLA-lknGBQgmO87U\\_x3ku6sms](https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them?fbclid=IwAR2hlm3DwPgtAqFJpXpxgKxu1YLafIHcCYLA-lknGBQgmO87U_x3ku6sms)

### **Conclusion:**

The science and data lead us to the conclusion that, because singing together in groups (in the congregation and in choirs) is high-risk, singing in groups should not occur at Spring Hill Presbyterian Church before availability of a vaccine and/or effective medical treatment. We will, of course, monitor the continuing research, and modify our practices accordingly.