

RICHMOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Deep with God, Wide with the World

Session Notes - March 2021

RPC Session met online via Zoom on Tuesday, Mar 23, our regular fourth Tuesday. I was among several elders who attended an online workshop March 13 on Hybrid Worship, and one thing I took to heart was to stop using the word 'virtual' to describe online events like our meeting. We've been using technology to mediate communications for generations: we don't say we had a 'virtual' conversation over the phone, we just talked. So, I'm adopting workshop presenter Dave Daubert's language of 'online' and 'on-ground'.



With vaccinations started, Session has begun to think about what church life and ministry will look like when pandemic restrictions finally ease. Much of our meeting covered this topic, but of course it is still very early days, plans are hypothetical and contingent on timetables beyond our control, and so not a lot of specifics to share at this point.

The afternoon before our meeting, Dr. Henry's office published a 'variance' to pandemic restrictions temporarily allowing limited outdoor worship services. She had heard from several faith communities for whom spring brings important festivals and observances. After a wide-ranging conversation, Session decided not to hold any outdoor services at this time. Outdoor worship gatherings could go up to 50 people, but we would have difficulty live streaming outside and of course it's still very early in our west coast spring.



For now, our worship will continue online, with additional services Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We may consider occasional outdoor worship later in the season, but there is planning required and it will not be a case of congregants simply showing up. Protocols including pre-registering, health forms, contact tracing, masking and distancing will be observed.

Hybrid church means that when we return to on-ground worship, bible studies, fellowship, and the like, we will not abandon online, but continue with both, matching ministries to the strengths of each format best-suited. And where we do both, e.g. live and recorded worship, they will not necessarily be identical. Going forward, we need to recognize that community can be achieved online if we intentionally design it this way and not just treat it as bringing a camera to the live event. We learned much about this at the Hybrid Worship workshop, and will continue to grow into how to effectively minister both on-ground and online.

News from the Outreach team: St Albans has indicated they will be running their community meal program year-round now, so we will not be helping them over summer this year. The team is considering options including other meal-related programs.



A lot of rethinking and re-calibrating lies ahead. The spring RPC Leadership Retreat will be held online tentatively on Saturday, June 5, and will revolve around hybrid church. A second online annual congregational meeting will follow, tentatively Sunday, June 27, where we can all discuss ways forward combining on-ground and online.

We hope you're not pining to go back to how it was before COVID. While on-ground in-person will remain the prime way we want to worship and minister, we have learned that technology is a wonderful enabler for going wider with the world and deeper with God.

As Easter approaches, we look forward to being able to gather in person again, but also to the new things that God will do in our midst!



*Faithfully,
Graeme Stager
Clerk of Session*