**RCPC and the 2020 Pandemic Narrative**

**Worldwide and Nationwide** – **The year 2020**

The year 2020 had a profound and lasting effect nationally and globally. The Flu like virus would soon be known and referred to as the COVID-19 virus and first appeared in the United States in early 2020. The first human cases of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, subsequently named SARS-CoV-2 (or commonly referred to as COVID-19) were first reported by officials in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019.

The narrative you will read here seeks to record the effect of COVID-19 on the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church Community during the year 2020 and early 2021. The RCPC Community cancelled, postponed, reflected, and responded in many ways during this time. The emotional, physical, and mental aspects of living through this global pandemic that claimed many lives both in the US (over 600,000 and over 3.5 million world-wide) as it spread cannot be understated.

Guidelines from both national (CDC) and state mandates guided how we went about our lives whiles three (3 Pharmaceutical companies in the U.S. researched, tested, and created a vaccine for this deadly virus within a year’s time. NOTE: A development of this magnitude normally takes 3 to 5 years. Distribution of the vaccine in the U.S. started in November 2020 and was still ongoing as of June 2021 many in the United States have received the vaccine and are now able to resume more pre-COVID-19 interactions with others. Shipments of the vaccine to other countries occurred in early Spring 2021.

Much has been said and written in various places in the past year as to how life was lived during this pandemic but we of the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church community can say that we continued in the **RCPC Mission:** **To Seek Christ, Serve Christ, Show Christ and Know God Through Christ.**

**Initial – Notices, Responses**

One of the earliest communications to the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Congregation (RCPC) was a Congregation wide email from our Senior Pastor/Head of Staff the Rev, Andrew C. Whaley outlining the CDC advisory and precautions for vulnerable portions of our population and how RCPC is responding with suggestions to RCPC congregants to act according to their personal situations and vulnerabilities.

RCPC Congregants were encouraged to engage in regular communication together over the coming weeks, spending time introducing themselves to each other, making sure that everyone had necessary food staples and household items.

 Offer a morning or bedtime prayer, share prayer concerns, send a card, or note.

**What was closed or limited access?**

Just like the surrounding outside world many/most activities at or in the RCPC building were abruptly Cancelled or postponed and eventually cancelled.

***Examples of cancelled events***:

Worship services: Choirs(all), Scheduled Guest Choirs and other musical events.

All meetings hosted or housed in the church or grounds. **Examples:**

Session Deacons Boards Ministry team meetings Fellowship dinners Bible study Volunteer Front Desk Receptionists Pre-School, Boy Scouts etc.…

**So How Did We Respond?**

RCPC Staff and leadership initially responded by reaching out to reassure and offering support to the congregation in several ways.

Communication to congregants about what was happening, initial and ongoing efforts of support, forming community support groups.

First developing some community groups of people in our congregation you can spend some time getting to know as we are not able to gather in person.  E-mails, text, phone calls, cards- ways to stay connected when we cannot be together.

**The Staff**

Explored, implemented, expanded ways to conduct worship, bible study, meetings, fellowship and maintain congregational connections keeping us all safe.

**Congregational and Community Outreach**

Offered support to assist with impacts on our congregants Financial and spiritual.

Requesting those who could continue their regular giving to support the life of RCPC.

Created a sidewalk prayer line.

**Mission**

 Donated funds throughour local mission partners.

Despite the pandemic restrictions RCPC members maintained or expanded and were generously embracing many **“Opportunities for Generosity”** such as: the South Sudan Water Project, the annual West End Center School Supply Drive, House of Bread, Roanoke Area Ministries (RAM), plus several others.

**A Learning Curve**

**Services**

Live Streaming Worship became an important lifeline to RCPC congregants.

A new way the Observe Communion: with Pre-packaged wafer& juice.

The expansion and refining the Sunday Morning service for at home worship of RCPC Congregants.

Recorded weekly Wednesday Reflections and posted online.

Instituted a Thursday evening prayer & music service.

**Meetings etc.**…

The expanding exploration of online technologies to host a virtual Bible studies and meetings. Several groups/teams elected to meet outdoors in the parking lot (socially separated and masked as needed). Fellowship dinners outside in the parking lot occurred as well as midday outside “Lunch Under the Oaks”. Outdoor Wednesday 7AM Prayer and Communion service resumed with social distancing in the RCPC Columbarium with a brief break for cold.

The staff and RCPC technical support team continued to refine and add to the audio-visual equipment and enhance the delivery of the Sunday Morning Worship service for at home worship of RCPC Congregants. These efforts also provided.

**Christmas at RCPC 2020**

Text

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Alternative Giving Tree

West End Sock and Underwear Collection

Sudanese Refugee Gift Drive

A picture containing text, sunset

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An outdoor Pageant done by the God Alive Children

**Services:**

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| |  | | --- | | A special evening prayer service offering space for the grief felt during the Christmas season acknowledging the collective grief carried in this year.  **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service** in the Parking Lot  **Christmas Day** On-Demand Service of Lessons and Carols on YouTube and Facebook. | |

**Holy Week 2020**

**Maundy Thursday** - RCPC congregants received an in-home Maundy Thursday worship guide. Included with the worship guide were a series of traditional Passover recipes, if you wished to incorporate those elements into your celebration. Communion was a part of this service, with a video link to a Great Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Words of Institution.

**Good Friday -**  7:30 PM on Friday Evening a live streamed worship service from the sanctuary, including the Passion narrative of Jesus' crucifixion, prayers, and special music.

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| **Easter Day** - Live streaming the worship service from the sanctuary on Easter at 11 AM celebrating the Lord's Resurrection.  **Late Spring /Summer/Early Fall 2020**  **Associate Pastor Search Committee -**  **Calling a New Associate Pastor**  RCPC moved forward in the Spring of 2020 trusting the Spirit for guidance by forming an Associate Pastor Nominating Committee despite COVID-19 restrictions. The committee of 8 members APNC successfully searched a new associate pastor for RCPC in early August 2020, RCPC received exciting information from the APNC informing us of a candidate they were putting forward to be our next Associate Pastor. After an electronic congregational vote, the Associate Pastor candidate was approved by the congregation. Our new Associate Pastor Isabella Fagaini started at RCPC on August 24th, 2020.  **Installation and Ordination**  Online participation and limited in person service to ordain and install the new Associate Pastor Isabella Fagaini. A drive-by parking lot greeting was organized to welcome the new Associate.  **Activities:**  Creation of a new ministry group: Conversations About Racial Equality (C.A.R.E)  Creation of a Lenten Devotional booklet with contributions from both current and past members.  Parking Lot Fellowship picnic dinners  Lunch under the Oaks  God Alive children meeting with Ms. Leigh for various outdoor activities.  Parking lot Bible studies & Bible studies hosted outdoors at various homes.  Creation and distribution of a Summer Devotional booklet  Wednesday 7AM Prayer and Communion in the Columbarium |
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Limited in person worship began in late June 2020 with initial capacity seating of 50 in the Sanctuary and 20 in the Chapel. Scripture, Hymns, and other portions of the service were projected onto the walls in the sanctuary chapel and gathering area (no use of bulletins, Bibles or Hymnals allowed). Masking and adherence to social distancing for safety with printed reminders in place for all to follow..

Resumption of two services began in September 2020 with capacity restrictions and recommended safety protocols for RCPC congregates.

RCPC’s staff and Tech teem continued to enhance the online and in person worship experience through increased audio and visual means.

**RCPC Youth**

Parking lot fun along with indoor worship (separation required) meetings, Wednesday Zoom check-in

**ZOOM**

Committees, Team meetings

Bible Study

Limited In-person worship started in June 2020.

**Funerals**

Were conducted with the recommended safety protocols (generally family only) and often graveside only services with limited attendance.

**RCPC recovers...2021.**

As we continued to adapt and find new ways to be in community with one another, the country was doing the same with masking and social distancing. Accordingly, the Session of RCPC voted to begin holding worship services again on Sunday, June 14. Mask were required and social distancing with designated seating places in the pews to enforce this, along with signage throughout the church declaring RCPC’s commitment to safely gather much as permitted by CDC guidance and the State of VA mandates was maintained.

To assist in fostering a sense reflection, connectivity, community spiritual sharing and growth, various members were asked to write contributions to a devotional series (Devotional - Lament and Hope) that covered the summer months of 2020. This devotional booklet was mailed to all RCPC households for their use.

Wednesday morning communion worship service; resumed in late July 2020 outdoors in the RCPC Columbarium with social distancing and individual communion elements.

In person worship which original resumed with both the 9:30 and 11:00 AM services were reduced to one service (11 AM) as the attendance was well below even the social distancing capacity of RCPC’s Sanctuary and Chapel and livestreaming the service continued as usual.

On select Thursday evenings the Music at Raleigh Court Series featured livestream musical offerings.

Repeating a well-received idea from the summer of 2020 RCPC invited various members to share devotional thoughts in a booklet complied and mailed to the entire congregation for Lent in 2021 each devotion had a musical selection to accompany the day’s devotion.

Many activities continued or expanded as both the national (CDC) and state guides permitted. Examples of such activities: Wednesday Dinner to Go, Opportunities each month for Generosity, Lunch and Learn in Lent, Adult Small Groups, Special Bible Studies, and more.

Ash Wednesday in 2021 took the form having the improvision of ashes available in the RCPC Columbarium (afternoon) and “Drive-Thru” ashes (6:00 to 6:30 pm).

RCPC also observed a Lenten Opportunity for Discipleship & Praying for Each Day by gathering weekly donated items for the Presbyterian Community Center’s Food Pantry.

RCPC instituted on each Tuesday in Lent Open-Door Prayers with persons entering in the Sanctuary from the side doors of the church to light a candle, to pray, to admire the beauty of the sanctuary, and to hear beloved songs of the season.

**Holy Week and Easter 2021**

**PALM SUNDAY was** still different in 2021 from what we were accustomed to as members were asked to register online for which service, they wanted to attend due to capacity limits

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

An in-home worship guide was sent to all members which allowed them to celebrate this night around their own tables in their own homes. Additionally, their weekly Fellowship Dinner was a to-go meal based on elements of the Jewish Seder incorporation into home worship

**GOOD FRIDAY**

The churches of Grandin Road joined together for the annual Good Friday Cross Walk. A service in the Sanctuary at gathering around the story of Christ’s crucifixion as the lights slowly extinguish and the chancel is stripped of the symbols of our Christian faith. Special music by instrumentalists and soloists was featured.

**EASTER SUNDAY**

Three worship services were held on Easter, as with Palm Sunday registration was required to make sure that all people can attend and maintain social distance. Services were held at 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, and 11:00 AM

Finally, there is no better way to conclude this narrative of the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church during this pandemic displaying this message sent April 3rd, 2021.

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| |  | | --- | | **Embodied Life Together - A Plan for Return** | |

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| |  | | --- | | *Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So, I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it.”*  *-Nehemiah 2:4-5*  As we continue to monitor the number of COVID-19 cases in our region as well as the vaccination numbers, we are moving toward a plan to resume many of our in-person activities at RCPC. Our daily prayer is that our faith has been even more integrated into the rhythms of home and work over this past year as we have not met in person as frequently, but we have sought to create alternative and new connection points, many of which will continue. We are resuming embodied worship and life in a transformed way- more grateful, compassionate, kind, and aware of the power of and need for the gospel of Jesus in our lives and in our community.  With new guidelines from the CDC, we are seeking to create a plan for more in-person opportunities over the spring and summer months. This is a tentative schedule that could be subject to change:   * **April 5** - Church groups may resume meeting in the building. If all members of the group are vaccinated, the group may meet without masks or practicing social distancing in their regular classroom. If all members are not vaccinated, they may meet in the Fellowship Hall, Room 201, or the Commons wearing masks and each sitting at their own 6-foot table. These groups include Committees, Deacons, Session, Small Group Bible Studies, Centering Prayer, Monday Morning Prayer Group, Handbell Rehearsal * **April 7** - Resume Outdoor Wednesday Communion Service at 7:00 AM in the Columbarium * **April 11**- Nursery & Children’s Worship at 11:00 AM (If registration numbers for available nursery spots are full, we will add nursery at 9:00 AM as well). [Contact Leigh Sackett to register.](mailto:leigh@rcpres.org) * [April 15 - Wednesday Parking Lot Picnics through May 7](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001I9hvRyuiZ0yoQ1g_Rc55J4RYF8AQ76hM-OgBDg3nBeS8ry3w3SPU1P1bPQx2rsuHnslxE_2v659i1x4z9afe3abyMCAQVn87mI_fv9pdC6nS2F6jThECHvOjCeXMkkncJkakJfGu69P3CzM5T4VFiJ1sQljFRf3tBko0HgtagUc1ZYnBGdyUFY9lB6vTBZtmuYnzEzG6mJxLCgSciMrM2PqHduVTtTZZMbN_BXaAb6ZdFg9Cxdq_UlhIxETMw8Pj&c=jgooEa5DEffZTZSnvluf8NetmRr4WQpFaAkfrx8IIZf4JC74MAXOiw==&ch=1F4MjyCBI2YzVHUWzlb4PTWcYv0INmwzfqWxBb93lEoZVyCUhY82aQ==) * **May**- Outdoor Sanctuary Choir Rehearsals (group singing refresher and music reading sessions) * **May 30**- Begin 10:00 AM Worship Service for the summer. Begin use of printed bulletins, pew Bibles, hymnals, and regular schedules for ushers. Continue use of basket in Gathering Area for collecting the offering. * **June 7**- Resume the services of volunteer receptionists at the front desk * **Throughout June**- Depending on attendance and COVID-19 numbers, we will either: * Allow members to remove masks in their seated area after the Passing of the Peace and until the Doxology - OR - * Reconfigure the tape in the pews so that individuals are spaced but seating is available in every pew. This will not allow for six feet of social distancing but allows for greater than three feet and masks would continue to be worn in the sanctuary at all times. * **August 22**- Worship with no sectioned seating or masks and Children’s Worship and Nursery return to their previous spaces and protocols * This date is contingent on state guidelines in Virginia at this time. We are watching the protocols regarding indoor dining at restaurants and the need for mask-wearing in retail establishments as a benchmark for this return to worship. * Passing of the Peace will still be suspended * Communion will still be celebrated with the prepackaged kits * Pastors will still greet worshipers outdoors following the service * **August 25**– Sanctuary Choir Rehearsals resume * **August 29**- Congregational Potluck Picnic at Mill Mountain * **September 12**- Rally Day and resuming all regular indoor activities * Resume the collection of the offering during worship * Resume the use of the Friendship Pads in the pews * **September 15**- Wednesday Communion Service returns to the Gathering Area and Fellowship Hour to follow * **October 3**- Worldwide Communion Sunday * Seated Communion and return to the regular elder assignments for serving communion * Homebound Communion resumes following the worship service   **Children and Youth activities will remain mostly outdoors through July with the use of masks and practicing social distancing. When events are held indoors, masks and social distance will also be maintained. The Children’s subcommittee and Youth subcommittee will bring a recommendation to Session when they believe it is advisable to resume these activities without mask-wearing and concern for the distance between individuals.**  *When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,*  *“For he is good,*  *for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”*  *-Ezra 3:10-11* | |

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