

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wrote to you a few weeks back to let you know that, at the direction of our Deacons, a small group of your friends would be working together to discuss the steps we need to take and protocols we need to put in place in order for us to begin gathering for shared worship as safely as possible. This group included: Drs. Paul Dalbec and Gerry Sullivan with their unique perspectives on the COVID-19 virus from within the medical community; Ross Anderson who, for many years, supervised the cleaning and sanitizing of a public hospital; Candy Bourque on behalf of our Children's Ministries; Ted Dwyer, a Deacon who also leads our Usher Ministry; and three members of our Board of Trustees selected to represent three different "generations" within our congregation: Gladys Anderson, Trevor Grist, and Noah Pepper.

We realize no plan is perfect or "foolproof" and that there will inevitably need to be tweaks and adjustments made along the way, but we believe with the following guidelines in place that we can begin welcoming our flock to resume worshiping together beginning on Sunday, May 24. Under the current guidelines set in place in late March by Governor Lamont, churches are on the list of "essential businesses" as long as gatherings are limited to less than 50 people. Following that directive, we can accommodate up to 49 people in our sanctuary. Until such time as that number is increased, if more than 49 choose to attend, we will use appropriately spaced overflow seating in the Fellowship Hall.

First and foremost we wish to impress on you that if you are unwell in any way or have a temperature in excess of 100 degrees, the most loving thing you can do is stay home. Please do not put others at risk or cause them to feel uncomfortable by joining with them. If you are well and you do come, we ask that everyone, including children, wear a mask in order to protect those among us who are most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. As unpleasant as the masks may be, they have been shown to be effective at containing airborne water droplets that are capable of spreading the virus. Wearing masks is a new way for the church to look out for the needs of others and to serve one another in love. If you do not have your own mask, we will provide one for you. Those serving on the platform will not be masked while they are up front, but they will be "donning" a mask when they come down from the platform and reenter the congregation. In addition to wearing masks, we are asking everyone to maintain the six-foot safe distancing between people that has become a feature in any other public space. Respecting each other's space and holding ourselves to safe distancing means that, for now, we must forgo personal, physical contact with one another in the form of handshakes and hugs. Naturally, families and couples who have quarantined together are able to be in closer proximity to each other, and we are asking that parents keep their children with them at all times while on church grounds.

The main doors of the building will be propped open for you to enter by, thus eliminating any need for you to touch door handles. If unusually inclement weather occurs requiring the doors to be closed, we will ask one of our Greeters or another person to serve as a "doorkeeper" and open the door for you. Who would have ever guessed that Psalm 84:10 [*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God*] would become a reality in our day?

As you make your way to the sanctuary, bulletins will be available for you to pick up from a stand in the narthex. Ushers will be on hand as you approach the sanctuary doors to remind you about observing safe distancing as you find a seat. Again, couples and families will naturally sit together leaving 2-3 empty chairs between groups or singles and not sitting directly behind or in front of someone else. If there are any places where people are seated too closely together, an usher will ask you to make whatever adjustment is necessary. Please be courteous of an Usher's request and cooperate with what you are asked to do. As we receive tithes and offerings and distribute the Communion elements, Ushers and Deacons will move among the congregation holding onto the offering plates and trays rather than having you pass them yourselves.

When the service is dismissed, we ask you to make use of all three exits at the rear of the sanctuary. Please be conscious of the six-foot distancing as you leave. There is no need for everyone to rush out the doors at once! To prevent a bottleneck at the center doors, Linda and I will greet you at a safe, six-foot distance within the Fellowship Hall. We invite you to stay and converse with one another following the service either in the sanctuary, in the Fellowship Hall or on the lawn out front (weather permitting). We again are asking parents to keep their children with them following the service as we cannot maintain safe distancing when children are rapidly changing positions (*i.e.* running around!). We will not serve refreshments or beverages for the time being. As we move forward and have a sense of how things are working, we will evaluate when and how we may safely provide snacks and beverages following the service. Following each of our gatherings on the Lord's Day, the entire building will be given a thorough cleaning including the appropriate disinfecting of surface areas (*i. e.* countertops, tables, etc...) on Mondays.

Although we will provide hand-sanitizer throughout the building at strategic locations, we encourage you to bring your own sanitizer with you and to make use of it periodically as you move within the building. Even more effective than hand sanitizer is hand washing. We have posted reminders about proper hand washing in the bathrooms and would reiterate what so many have counseled in so many different forums that proper hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways to combat the COVID-19 virus. An additional trash receptacle has been placed outside of bathrooms on each level so that you may use the paper towel with which you dry your hands to open the bathroom door as you exit and then dispose of it.

Until we have been "up and running" again for a few weeks, we will not offer any of our children's classes or nursery care. When our teachers have had time to assess things together and make appropriate plans, we will resume our children's CE as best we can. It is hoped that our Adult CE (Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights) will be able to start back up again soon. Masks will need to be worn for these sessions, and, for the time being, we will not be serving any food or beverage in the Library.

Knowing that not everyone is going to feel immediately ready or comfortable to be in a group setting, we plan to continue the Live Stream process indefinitely for those who feel safer worshiping with us from home. Even with precautions in place, people who are particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus should give careful thought to the potential of being exposed to the virus in any group setting. As we gather and interact with one another, we need to be especially respectful of the fact that there are many different viewpoints about the way the world has been and is responding to this moment in history. We who belong to Christ's body need to accept and tolerate one another's perceptions about "the way things are" without judgment. Just as Christ has torn down ethnic and socioeconomic barriers to create the church which is **His** body and bride, so too has our Lord called us to prefer one another in love when it comes to other nonessential matters such as divergent viewpoints and strongly held beliefs about how things should or should not be handled by our governing authorities.

Moving forward in unity will require cooperation and mutual submission to one another. It is possible that Paul's words in Philippians 2:4 that "each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" will have never been a more important watchword for us than it will be during the months that lie ahead as God continues to unfold His providence in this situation.

May the Lord be glorified in us as we seek to serve Him,
Pastor Tom