



May 20, 2020

WAITING TO REOPEN

When we closed the church building, briefly on March 7-8 and then indefinitely on March 13, we did not know when we might reopen. I remember how I privately hoped that we would worship together on Easter Sunday, April 12. Although there is still much to learn, we now have more clarity about the months ahead.

Our church will not hold worship inside the church building until at least late August. I am grateful to Church Council and the Board of Deacons for providing a clear plan that is prudent, inclusive, and loving. By continuing to focus our energies on virtual ways of worshipping and connecting, we are helping members, volunteers, and church staff to minimize their exposure to others and risk of infection. I hope that you have been able to read the detailed letter that was sent out earlier this week.

Here's what we *can do* in the months ahead.

Ministers are conducting small, outdoor services, observing physical distancing in a group of ten or fewer people. So far, these services have included funerals at a cemetery, and one wedding in the yard of a private home. Looking ahead, we will explore the possibility of small outdoor services for prayer, and even for baptisms. As conditions change, we may be able to allow for larger groups, depending on the space available.

Virtual worship will be provided every Sunday, and will feature worship leaders in separate recordings. John Finney is working diligently this month to make video recordings of worship music for the entire summer, so that when the sanctuary and chapel are under renovation (and the pipe organs protectively wrapped), our virtual worship services will permit each of us to pay a virtual visit to the sanctuary.

This Monday, May 18, Governor Baker and the Reopening Advisory Board announced that places of worship in Massachusetts are now allowed to reopen under certain conditions. However, these guidelines still recommend that worship be virtual or outdoors, while indoor worship is limited to 40% of capacity, and subject to a host of other restrictions. You can read the full standards for places of worship here: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/safety-standards-for-places-of-worship>

I appreciate and support the work of our leaders in Massachusetts. I am also convinced that our church is following a wise course, recognizing that being allowed to reopen does not mean that reopening is the best expression of our mission.

We have clarity about our ministry for the next three months, and the opportunity to reassess in August.

We will be prudent and inclusive, and this is how we love our neighbors.

We will be the church together.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister