



# first community united methodist church

OF MEDFORD

May 19, 2020

Dear First Community family,

I hope you are staying in God's good care in this trying season. I assume most of us are now aware of the State of Massachusetts's decision on re-opening. You may find more information here: [www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-massachusetts).

As a house of worship, First Community United Methodist Church of Medford is "eligible to resume" as of yesterday. However, as the District Superintendents serving in Massachusetts, including Rev. We Chang, stated in their message to the clergy, "Just because we can legally reopen a sanctuary for worship does not necessarily mean that we should right away." We need to remember that there are critical restrictions and conditions to be reviewed before we decide when we return to the church building.

Based on "Sector Specific Workplace Standards for Places of Worship and Religious Services to Address COVID-19," presented on May 18 by Governor Charles Baker ([www.mass.gov/lists/safety-standards-for-places-of-worship](http://www.mass.gov/lists/safety-standards-for-places-of-worship)) and "Guidelines for In-Person Worship & Ministry during COVID-19," updated on May 18 by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar and the Annual Conference's Re-entry Team ([www.neumc.org/virus-reentry](http://www.neumc.org/virus-reentry)), here is the information we need to know regarding the re-opening:

- As a United Methodist congregation in New England, we are **not allowed** to have any in-person gathering **until June 1**.
- When we gather in-person, we must wear masks and practice **strict social distancing procedures**, except for medical or behavioral excuses.
- In the church building, there will be **no Sunday School, child care, choir performance, communal singing, or coffee hour** until we have further guidelines from the State and the denomination.

And here are some additional matters we need to consider that apply to our specific situation:

- We need to remember our decision will affect **other groups** who are using space **in our church building**.
- Once the church building is re-open, my spouse will need to take care of the kid at home and **cannot be our technician for online service anymore**. If we want a hybrid of in-person and online service, we need a dedicated volunteer with updated equipment for live-streaming on Sundays.

Please remember no decision will be made on an individual level. I, as your pastor, will go through a communal discernment-process with appropriate leaders and groups of the church, including the Lay Leader, the Chairperson of the Church Council, the Board of Trustees, and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). In the meantime, do not hesitate to reach out to me when you have any questions.

In their statement on the State's re-opening plan, the Massachusetts Council of Churches affirms that "**Churches are designed to be places of healing, not sources of sickness**" ([www.masscouncilofchurches.org](http://www.masscouncilofchurches.org)). As a place and community of healing, we strive to provide the best for the most vulnerable in our church. We do not want anyone to feel unsafe, isolated, or behind. Like what we have done amazingly in this challenging season so far, **we stay as a church that loves and embraces all God's children regardless of their age, health condition, and the level of anxiety they are experiencing**.

Until we arrive at a conclusion of when we return to the church building, our online service on [www.facebook.com/firstcommunityumc](https://www.facebook.com/firstcommunityumc) remains a foundation for our connection to God and with one another.

With love and peace,

Pastor Suji

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