

July 8, 2020

Dear Members and Friends,

As we think with you about how we will **return to in-person worship**, beginning **this coming Sunday, July 12**, it's been a long time coming after these months of suspension! Yet the joyful news of regathering is also tempered by the fact that the Corona virus is still with us and that we must meet careful protocols mandated by CDC and Essex Board of Health for places of worship, in order to protect one another when we gather.

If you do not feel comfortable returning to a large, indoor gathering, that is quite understandable! You may live-stream our worship each Sunday on www.Facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchOfEssex. Worship will begin at 9:30 a.m., and then be saved on our Facebook page so that you may join at a later time, if you desire.

For those who will return, we ask that you let us know in advance (reply to this email) in order to make sure we have enough space, given the 40% of maximum seating capacity we are permitted to use. This, and other guidelines, from not passing an offering plate, to not using a bulletin, to bringing your own Bibles if you want to follow along, are intended to keep us wise about our interaction with one another.

The building will be well cleaned and sanitized prior to our gathering each Sunday. Sadly, for the foreseeable future, we will not be able to offer nursery care or Children's Church.

Worship will begin at 9:30 a.m. Please try to arrive a few minutes early as our seating arrangements, and entry into the sanctuary, have changed. The **safety protocols** that we must observe include:

- Wearing a mask covering both nose and mouth. (Exceptions are a medical condition that precludes the wearing of such, and children under 5 at the discretion of parents.)
- Enter, and exit, the church on the north, back side by the elevator and use that stairway. Maintain proper social distancing as you do so. Sign-in and sanitize your hands at the door.
- Seating will be available every fourth pew, as marked. Family units may sit together but there must be at least 6 feet of distance between families and others.
- Only bathrooms and the sanctuary will be available.
- Offerings are still preferred by mail or electronically, although there will be an offering plate at the entrance to the sanctuary.
- After worship, you will be dismissed row by row and asked to proceed directly to your car, or walk home, and not to congregate on the sidewalks. We will not be able to offer a coffee hour.
- If you are feeling unwell for any reason, please remain at home.

Finally, please be patient, prayerful, and flexible...and keep your sense of humor! These continue to be new days and ways for us all. If you have any questions, please reach out.

Grace & Peace, Pastor Tim