



## First United Methodist Church

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May 27, 2020

Dear First Church Family,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

On May 5, a task force with representatives from our church's administrative committees and staff began planning for reopening the church. The word, "reopening" is a bit of a misnomer. First Church has never really been closed!

Since mid-March when the decision was made to close the church building, we have been alive and active! In fact we've seen some amazing things happen since we've been gathering online for worship and small groups. I'm really proud of our efforts to support each other and to help people in our community with food and other necessities. Your generous giving has helped our church's ministry continue at this most critical time.

As our county has moved into the yellow phase, we've begun to see some businesses reopen. We've also seen some churches begin to meet in their buildings. While we're longing for the day when we can all be together again, our task force has decided not to reopen the building at this time. This decision was guided by **three important commitments**.

**#1 Safety:** We're committed to taking appropriate measures to ensure the health and safety of every person in every activity related to First Church, whether it takes place in our building or another location. We're also committed to honoring and respecting elected officials, following the advice of medical experts, and protecting the broader Mechanicsburg community. As I said in the sermon this past Sunday, maintaining high standards of safety and protection for all, we are being good neighbors.

**#2 Hospitality:** We're committed to extending hospitality to everyone. Public health officials advise that in the yellow phase indoor gatherings be limited to 25 people. If we begin holding public services now, who gets left out? Even if we gather in two or three spaces in the building at multiple times, we will still have to exclude most of our congregation.

Officials also advise that younger children, people age 65 and over, and others who are vulnerable remain safely at home. Opening the building for worship now does not allow us to "feel like us." Nor does it allow us enthusiastically to welcome new people into the life of our congregation.

Until restrictions are lifted and we can hold larger gatherings, we will continue to hold worship services, classes, small groups, and other activities online. In addition, soon we may be able to begin in-person gatherings in small groups that meet outside of the church building. Following appropriate social guidelines, these meetings would provide some good first steps toward reengaging with one another and our community.

**#3 Clear Communication:** We're committed to communicate clearly so that everyone understands what we are doing, why we are doing it, and that they will be able to participate in it in some way. We do not know how long it will be until we move into the next phase and can safely hold larger gatherings, but we are already making plans so that we will be ready.

Please continue to pray with me in this time of national crisis. Pray for the suffering and the grieving, for the helpers and the researchers, and for public servants and community leaders. I also ask for your prayers for the pastors, staff, and leaders of our church and other churches. We believe that our present and our future are in the hands of a loving God! We are a people of hope!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Denny

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*Opening Doors with Christ, One Another and Our Neighbors*