



June 25, 2020

Dear members, friends, and staff of Christ Church,

We are so appreciative of all the support and understanding offered by so many of you during this difficult time. We have succeeded in keeping the Church open, while our buildings have been closed. Thank you for your help!

Today I am writing to update you on our plans to re-gather the parish for in-person worship. As you know, our last “normal” Sunday morning worship services took place on March 8. Then COVID-19 happened! We quickly transitioned to offer our service streaming on-line and have continued with our weekday Morning Prayer services offered via Zoom, later adding twice weekly Compline services, as well as Christian formation and other fellowship gatherings.

On May 24 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts authorized churches to hold public worship services, however the bishops of the two Episcopal Dioceses in Massachusetts did not authorize any Episcopal Church to re-gather for public worship until July 1, at the very earliest.

As I write, the date of July 1 still stands as the date on which Episcopal Churches may begin to hold in-person worship services; HOWEVER, our bishops are strongly encouraging churches to take their time and be fully prepared before offering in-person worship and to that end have offered resources and a process to undertake, requiring a great deal of work on the part of the parish. A full plan, and the completion of a thorough checklist are required and must be presented to the bishop for prior approval before regathering.

We have already initiated this process by assembling a re-gathering task force. We are working through the checklist, and we are actively engaged with a diocesan consultant to ensure that we are as prepared as possible. There is much work to be done and a great many decisions to be made. For those who are interested, the document “A Journey By Stages” can be found [here](#), and the “Stage Two Checklist” (which is a shorter form, the longer form is 31 pages!), can be found [here](#).

As a result of many factors I write to announce that we are preparing to apply to enter stage two and begin holding weekly in-person worship services after Labor Day weekend. This, of course, is subject to change by factors beyond our control, but **we hope to hold our first in-person worship service on Sunday, September 13.**

This is a decision arrived at through much thought and care. We believe it is the most prudent plan of action as it gives us time to fully prepare, to observe the trajectory of the Coronavirus in our area, and to honor much needed vacation time for our staff in July and August.

Everyone is Welcome at God’s Table ~ Christ Church Andover

Please know that we understand and appreciate the deep longing and necessity that you have to gather at 33 Central Street with fellow parishioners to worship our God together on a regular basis. We understand our call to care for the spiritual lives of our parishioners and to proclaim God's reconciling love in the person of Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit who calls us into community. We also strongly believe that the "church" is not the building, nor is it visible only when a group of the faithful are gathered together, but each and every one of us are members of Christ's body, the Church, through our baptism and the daily living of our baptismal covenant.

I also want to let you know, briefly and in a preliminary way, what worship services will be like in September and for the foreseeable future.

- Because of the physical distancing requirements our services will be limited to a number between 50 and 75, depending on how many members of the same household are able to sit together in a pew.
- As a result, we will be instituting a sign-up process both in order to determine attendance and also to gather information about who is attending since we will be required to notify all in attendance, as well as the Andover Board of Health, should anyone attending that service contract COVID-19.
- Masks will be required.
- There will be no distribution of Holy Communion.
- There will be a number of protocols, including specific instructions for entering and exiting the church and restrictions on movement while in the church.
- There will be no coffee hour or other social gathering prior to or following the services.
- There will be no singing, either by the congregation or choir.
- There will be no in-person church school, youth gatherings, or nursery care.
- We ask you NOT to attend if you are ill or unwell, or if you have been around others who are ill or feeling unwell.

This will, obviously, make for a very different worship experience and we will share more information as we continue our planning process.

We are also very much aware that there will be a number of our parishioners who will choose not to attend in-person worship services and we wish to be very clear in our intention to continue to minister to them fully. **To that end the current on-line video worship offering will continue in addition to any in-person worship.**

I ask for your consideration, patience, and understanding that we are doing everything possible to care for our parishioners. First and foremost, this means caring for our physical health and well-being.

With continued prayers and blessings,



The Rev. Michael J. Hodges
Rector