

May 17, 2021

Dear Family of Faith,

We are writing to you, full of hope, to advise you of actions taken by Session to lead us through the next few months as we continue to steer the church through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

At a special called meeting held via Zoom on Wednesday, May 12th, Session approved reopening our church building for in-person worship services on or soon after July 4, 2021.

At that same meeting, Session also approved (a) the purchase of livestreaming equipment that will enable virtual worship services in real time for those who cannot or do not wish to attend in person, and (b) the reopening of the church office. These actions were approved after receiving, responding to, and extensively discussing the recommendations of the Building Reopening Task Force, as well as reopening plans and guidance issued by federal, state, and local governments. The Task Force—to which the Session expresses its profound thanks on behalf of us all—is comprised of experts and leaders from our congregation. It has met and reported to the Session periodically throughout the pandemic as Session has sought to make prudent decisions regarding the church's status and safety protocols.

In-person worship and livestreaming capabilities: The church building will reopen for in-person worship services *on or soon after* July 4. Recognizing that some of you may not feel comfortable returning to in-person worship at that time, the reopening date is timed to coincide with the installation of livestreaming equipment in the sanctuary. This equipment will provide real-time on-line video access of worship services held in the sanctuary (*i.e.*, the traditional 11 a.m. worship service); the Celebration! service, held in Old Buttonwood Hall, will not be livestreamed. The livestreaming system is scheduled to be installed in late June, so the expectation is that we will resume in-person worship on Sunday, July 4. If the installation is delayed, the resumption of in-person worship services will be delayed as well. The Session believes that the livestreaming capability is a vital component of our reopening strategy because Jesus commands us to *love one another* and loving one another means including *everyone* in the life of the church.

Also, while Session recognizes that access to safe and effective vaccines has changed the calculus of how we approach our life together, the ventilation issues particular to our sanctuary are unchanged. Those ventilation issues demand a conservative approach to our reopening.

For these reasons, our building reopening will be somewhat later than the reopening dates recently announced by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and City of Philadelphia.

Reopening of the church office: The Church office will reopen on Tuesday, June 1, 2021; office hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. As always, calling ahead before you intend to arrive is a best practice, and making an appointment to see Baron is a good idea, too. Our staff never stopped working during our long period of closure. The reopening of the office just means that they will be doing more work on site but will be no less busy.

You will receive additional information as our church moves toward the transitional reopening, including information about the precise date when in-person worship will begin, what safety protocols will be mandated, and how to access the livestream services.

In the meantime, please join us in thanking the members of the Building Reopening Task Force, all of whom have so freely shared their gifts with our congregation, and the church staff, who have adapted our ministry throughout the pandemic. Finally, we thank you, the congregation, for your commitment to First Church during this extraordinarily difficult season of our church's life.

The church is not the building, it is *you*. You have made all the difference with your prayers, your love for one another, and your support of our leaders as we have sought to do what is right, *to the glory of God*.



Rebecca S. Melley
Clerk of Session



Dr. Baron A. Mullis
Pastor