



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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May 20, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Pastors and Key Lay Leaders
FROM: Thomas J. Bickerton
RE: Church Re-Opening Guidelines

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

In the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus is about to ascend to heaven. In these wonderful verses, Jesus voices a prayer to God on behalf of those who have followed him. In that prayer he says,

*They'll continue in the world when I return to you.
Holy God, guard them as they pursue this life
that you conferred as a gift through me,
that they may be one heart and mind
as we are one heart and mind.
(John 17: 10-11, The Message)*

We are continuing in the world, as the communion liturgy states, "until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet." It is our responsibility, based on the calling God through Holy Spirit gave us, to pursue this life as a gift, working faithfully to be of one heart and mind as we discern and live out the will of God.

There is no doubt that this work has become far more challenging and difficult since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Major sacrifices and significant changes in our norms and practices have been made. It has not been easy and will not get any easier even as we begin to find our way back into in-person worship and ministry.

The states of New York and Connecticut have begun a slow and deliberate process of phasing us back into a reopening of our life together. In response to those plans, our New York Annual Conference has also begun making plans for how we can deliberately and intentionally begin thinking and preparing for

the reopening of our churches for worship and other ministries.

Here is your direct link to a large document entitled, [New York Annual Conference Covid-19 Guidelines For Church Reopening](#), along with [supporting documents for your reference and use](#). Inside this document are the step-by-step processes and protocols that must be met and complied with before any of our local churches can reopen.

This is a large document. I urge you to find a place where you can sit, read, and digest this material cover to cover. Please begin thinking about how to start the work that is detailed inside. You will discover that this work will not be easy to accomplish. As a result, you need to keep in mind both why this is necessary and how this can be accomplished—with no compromises or shortcuts.

We do this work to keep people safe. We do it thoroughly and completely in order to bring no harm to the people who need our life-saving message.

Next week you will also receive this material in hard copy form for your use.

To assist you in the interpretation of this work, two webinars have been set up next week so that you can hear from me about the specifics and raise any questions you may have.

The webinars are as follows:

- (All Clergy) Tuesday, May 26 at 10:00 a.m.
- (Lay Leadership) Tuesday, May 26 at 5:00 p.m.

Your participation in these webinars will provide you with clarity and direction. We've also created a special email address (churchreopening@nyac.com) that you can use to reach our offices with any questions that you may have about the Guidelines for Reopening document.

Your District Superintendents and Parish Coordinators will be brought up to speed on this material in order to provide you with assistance and support.

These are days that present each of us with great challenges and potential fear. They are days that demand from us great focus and determination. In her book, [Finding our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time](#), Margaret Wheatley writes:

In Christian traditions, times of chaos have been called “dark nights of the soul. . . .” In the dark night, we feel devoid of meaning, totally alone, abandoned by God. These dark times are the conditions for rebirth, for a new and stronger self to emerge.

I believe that. These days are uncertain, but I believe God will use these days, and us, to bring new

light and new hope to the chaos all around us. As we work together to intentionally re-shape and re-open our churches, we can provide the light necessary to keep our people safe and to offer them the hope and encouragement they need so that a stronger self can emerge.

I look forward to working with you in these days to bring that light and hope to each of our communities and to all of the people we are called to serve

The Journey Continues, . . .



Thomas Bickerton
Resident Bishop

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