

**The First Community Church of Southborough  
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**June 13, 2021**

**The Third Sunday after Pentecost**

**Keeping in Touch**

**Resuming Worship: Sunday, June 27, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.!!**

The Diaconate has met with the leaders of the church this morning to finalize plans for the resumption of worship. With COVID numbers (cases, hospitalizations, deaths) down, certainly well below the target numbers that we had in mind for reopening, with the relaxation of restrictions in our state effective already, and the percentage of people fully vaccinated up over 50% and growing, we are presently planning to resume worship in our sanctuary on **Sunday, June 27, 2021!** Of course, something totally unexpected could happen before then, but as it stands now, that target date seems realistic to all of us.

Because of the relaxed pandemic restrictions recently announced by Governor Baker, and after consulting with other clergy about what they are doing in their churches, we have decided to resume worship in the sanctuary, not outdoors.

When the pandemic hit, the general consensus was that no one was interested in the alternative forms of worship employed by some other churches. We didn't want to hold worship in our parking lot with neighbors mowing their lawns, which they always seem to do on Sunday mornings (they must be Catholics!), cars going by on both Highland Street and Southville Road, and ambient noise from the occasional passing train. We also didn't want to sit ensconced in our individual cars in our little parking lot (we only have room for about ten cars) and try to find a way for me in my car to transmit a worship service over the radio to you.

We considered the possibility of holding live services on Facebook (which I don't do) or Zoom (a stretch for many of our people), but we felt that setting up an option that involved a lot of work, a level of expertise that is frankly beyond me, and which still excluded a sizable number of our members didn't make sense. So, we settled for a weekly Keeping in Touch church newsletter, a church-in-society section of social concerns, a pastor's reflection/sermon, and an audio version of an abbreviated worship service, all of which, thanks to David Crane, could be accessed through our church web site or that I would send directly to people through email. It was, of course, not ideal, but it was the best we could do under the circumstances.

The following are the guidelines that were decided by consensus at our meeting this morning for the resumption of worship on June 27.

1. Services will be held inside the sanctuary.
2. Congregants are not to socialize inside the church either before or after the worship service (this is a killer for us!). If you would like to chat with your brothers and sisters in Christ, you could come early and/or stay late and be with each other either in the parking lot or on the front lawn.
3. In light of the size of our congregation and our sanctuary, if we wear masks and observe social distancing, you will not need to make a reservation to attend worship.
4. There is no need to rope off or block off certain sections of the pews. If a family cluster sits at the ends of one pew and another cluster sits in the middle of the next pew, people will be more than six feet apart from each other. We just need to use common sense regarding where we sit.
5. Access to the sanctuary will initially be from the front door only. The downstairs doors will be closed and locked with signage directing people to the front door. We decided to start with this arrangement, though the rationale for it was not clear to any of us, and move to using all three entrance doors within a month or two.
6. Signage at the front door will note that masks and social distancing are required, regardless of vaccination status. We will not ask people about their vaccination status. However, following state guidelines, within a few months we should be able to move to not requiring masks for people who are fully vaccinated.

7. A box of paper masks and a hand sanitizer dispenser for your convenience will be positioned inside the front door.
8. In lieu of collecting the morning offering by handing the plate to each other, the offering plate will be positioned at the back of the sanctuary near the doors. Once again, within a few months this precaution probably won't be necessary.
9. Bulletins will be one-time use only, not recycled as we usually do during the summer.
10. We will utilize individually wrapped combination communion cup and wafer units for the Sacrament of Holy Communion, which we will observe July 4, August 1, and September 5. They will be available at the back of the sanctuary for worshippers to pick up when they enter on communion Sundays.
11. There will be no Bible study on Sunday mornings preceding the worship service.
12. There will be no coffee hour following the worship service. If all goes well, Sunday morning Bible study and the Tuesday afternoon Spiritual Study and Growth Group should be able to resume in person in September.
13. There will be no choir. Resumption of the choir will be at the discretion of Pastor Paul, the Diaconate, Michael Larson, and the choir members. Since the choir seldom sings at Sunday services in the summer, we will look forward to resuming in September.
14. The church will be professionally cleaned prior to reopening, and every other week after that.
15. We have decided not to encase the pulpit or lectern with a plexiglass shield. The general consensus was that this is unnecessary. Pilgrim Church will not be using a shield, and the UCC church in Groton, which Corey serves, is in the process of removing theirs. Roman Catholic parishes, at least in this diocese, do not utilize the shields.
16. We decided that we (wearing masks) will sing hymns and other responses in the worship service.

To our credit, we have been (mostly) very patient during this difficult period, a time when we were guided by an abundance of care and an abundance of caution in our decisions. It has been a difficult time for all of us, especially for those of us who have lost loved ones. We know things will never go back to the way they were, but we trust that God will lead us forward as individuals and as a church into the “new normal” that we will need to embrace!

**I hope we see you all on June 27 at 11:00 a.m.!**

### **Personal Prayer Requests**

#### **We hold in prayer:**

- Marilyn Page, one of Darlene’s dearest friends, now living in Seattle. Marilyn is undergoing intensive treatment for multiple myeloma.
- Evelyn Till’s son, Eddy, who is still recovering from a recent stroke.
- Martha Hubley, who is still recovering from a mild heart attack.
- Danny, Dianne Simmons’s colleague’s husband who is still on Hospice care because of extensive lung damage from COVID-19 five months ago. Our prayers are with him and his family.
- Emily Harris, whose cancer is no longer in remission.
- Mark Mazelli, one of our new Friends of the Church, as asked us to put his dear, lifelong friend Marc on our prayer list. Marc, who is only 46 years old, recently had his C5 vertebra replaced. He was recently diagnosed with thyroid, spinal, and lung cancer. The radiation destroyed his vertebra, rendering him with a broken neck. Mark says that his friend is “thinking about his mortality more than ever before.”
- I personally want to thank all of you who held me in your thoughts and prayers following my recent melanoma surgery. The margins around the three spots that were removed are totally clear. Also, there is no trace of the melanoma in either of the two sentinel lymph nodes in my neck that the surgeon also removed. So, I have a “relatively” clean bill of health! I have the feeling that, considering the amount of time that passed without my regular dermatological checks, I really dodged the bullet on this one! Lesson learned!

**(If you are in need of prayer or if you know of someone who stands in need of prayer, and you would like to ask us to pray for them/you, please let me know.)**

**Thank you to:**

- Those church members who have turned in their 2021 pledges to the General Fund, and those Friends of the Church who have either already sent or pledged a special gift to support us financially in the year to come.

**Celebrations**

	
<b><i>Birthdays</i></b>	
Barbara Crane	1 <sup>st</sup>
Tyler Hilbert	10 <sup>th</sup>
Darlene Sanderson	23 <sup>rd</sup>
Dianne Simmons	23 <sup>rd</sup>
Justin Hubley	24 <sup>th</sup>
<b><i>Anniversaries</i></b>	
Sharon & Skip Willman	20 <sup>th</sup>
Beth & Peter Hook	23 <sup>rd</sup>

**Audio Weekly Worship Service--Discontinued**

Today will be the last time we will post on our website or email to you the audio weekly worship service. This audio service was designed to carry us through the period when we were unable to gather together in worship. There is really no need to continue this once we are back together on Sunday mornings.

**Quote/Thought of the Day on Patience**

A quote or thought on patience is included in this newsletter every week because an abundant supply of patience is not only important for us in weathering this pandemic; it's one of the most important personality characteristics/qualities/gifts that we can have in life.

Patience is an important factor in unearthing, developing, and expressing our creativity.

*“Great patience is called for on the hard path that I have entered on.”*

Edgar Degas

**A Second Quote/Thought of the Day**

*“Do not seek God in outer space—*

*Your heart is the only place in which to meet him face to face.”*

Angelus Silesius

**A Third Quote/Thought of the Day**

*“If the people don’t want to come out to the ballpark,  
nobody’s going to stop them.”*

Yogi Berra

**Worship Service Music**

The Prelude for today’s devotional service is the existential, thought-provoking cut by Pink Floyd, *Is There Anybody Out There?* The Postlude, a response to the question raised by the Prelude, is *Precious Lord, Take My Hand, Lead Me Home*, also known as *I Am Standing on the Mountain*.