



****Please read thoroughly as our worship protocols are beginning to be updated in response to the current CDC recommendations. The changes below will begin to take effect for Sunday, May 30th, adhering to the timeline of the most recent Executive Order of the Governor****

May 20, 2021

Beloved Friends and Members of the Church,

Throughout this last year of pandemic response, our church leaders and myself, to the best of our ability and with the help of God, have sought to make decisions that are faithful and compassionate as we have responded to Maine CDC guidance and State requirements. We have sought to do this in a way that honors the diversity of opinion among us as we have held the ultimate goal of moving the entire congregation forward together every step of the way. We have acknowledged that each step may not be the step we would personally desire, and yet we have continually and prayerfully proceeded with the commitment to our shared sense of covenant as the people of Jesus Christ here in this place.

With last weeks' announcements from the CDC and the Governor's Office bringing much joy, hope, and even a bit of confusion with specific guidance still lagging, our Church Council met for their regularly scheduled monthly meeting last evening (Wednesday, May 19th), seeking to respond faithfully to these new changes. While there are still steps to be taken as we await more guidance from the State, seek answers regarding liability, and look for clarity regarding the vaccine specific elements of these changes, the following worship protocol updates have been approved by the Council to take effect on Monday, May 24th:

- 1) **Beginning on Monday, May 24th**, capacity limits will be lifted and weekly worship sign-ups will no longer be required. All who are comfortable to attend in-person are welcome! This is consistent with the Governor's Executive Order and is not vaccine specific. As congregants arrive, everyone will be asked to sign-in for contact tracing purposes until further guidance is received.
- 2) **Beginning on Monday, May 24th**, social distancing in the sanctuary will be eased as we ask those attending to sit in every other pew. The ushers will no longer seat you as you arrive.

Please note that this does not affect worship for this Sunday, May 23rd.

In addition to these updates of the Council, the following previous protocols will continue for the time being as we await to make further decisions when more guidance and clarity are available:

- 1) Masks will continue to be required in the sanctuary for the entire duration of the service. This was reaffirmed by the Council until more information around this vaccine specific step is available for the next Council meeting on Wednesday, June 16th.
- 2) Hand sanitizer will be at the entrance for use.
- 3) We will not be passing the collection plate. Offerings may be left in a plate by the door as you enter or may be mailed to the church office.
- 4) There will be no passing the microphone for announcements or prayer requests. Prayers should continue to be shared with Rev. Josh prior to the service (by phone, email, or in person).
- 5) There will be no congregational singing in the sanctuary at the present moment. A soloist will offer the hymns from the side hallway by the piano for us to receive.

These protocols will, of course, be re-evaluated at further Church Council meetings as we look with hope toward more changes when further clarity comes.

Beginning on Sunday, May 30th, several worship elements that were discontinued in response to the pandemic will also return, including the Call to Worship, Prayer of Confession, and a Dedication of the Offering. We may explore the possibility of singing the closing hymn outdoors together (more to come). Outdoor seating will be available weekly (weather permitting) for anyone who would like to bring a chair and worship with us outdoors! The Hospitality Committee is also planning to begin modified, outdoor coffee hour (weather permitting) on Sunday, June 20th.

As we take these next steps and strive to do so as safely and faithfully as possible for those who wish to attend, please know that **worship will continue to be livestreamed!** You will still be able to watch and worship with us via Zoom and Facebook Live at 10am on Sunday mornings, receiving the same worship as those who may attend in-

person. A recording of the service will continue to be made available afterwards on our YouTube channel.

As we each continue to make the best choice for ourselves, our households, and all whom we love, please consider prayerfully the protocols, the needs of your household, the vaccination status of yourself and your loved-ones, and other factors that may inform your decision on how you will worship. If you have any cold or flu-like symptoms, if you have a fever, if you have been in contact with a Covid-19 positive person in the last 14 days, or if you have health concerns for yourself or others in your household, please continue to worship virtually.

Over the next several days and weeks, we expect more information and more clarity to come as we see much hope on the horizon and more steps to follow. Until then, we welcome these new steps!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Council President Anne Harris (annepharris58@gmail.com or 207-882-7705) or myself (joshfitterling@myfairpoint.net or 207-882-7544).

May we continue to prayerfully, graciously, and with love for the needs of one another, journey onward together!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Josh Fitterling, Minister