



May 23, 2020

Dear Members of the Presbytery of Philadelphia,

Since the beginning of this pandemic, we – the Presbytery of Philadelphia leadership and the Commission on Ministry – have asked our congregational leaders to honor and adhere to the guidance of the governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the public health department. To that end, we have requested and encouraged our church buildings to remain closed for worship until such time as the “shelter in place” directive is lifted or modified. We believe this action reflects our ‘Jesus call’ to care for the common good as we seek to honor God’s commandment to love one another and our neighbor in the world. We have been grateful for your faithful response.

It is our understanding that the counties in which we worship will remain in “red” zones until June 5th. At that point, we expect to hear an announcement that moves our counties into “yellow” zones. This categorization will allow for smaller gatherings while practicing social distancing, continuing to wear a mask in public, etc.. As we learn about additional restrictions, we will make those known.

It is clear from watching other parts of the nation, that “yellow” will not provide the framework for gathering for worship in our buildings. Sadly, we will probably not be in our buildings for worship for some time yet. We encourage you to continue to creatively find ways in which to claim your covenant community and the love of Christ that binds you to one another. You have already demonstrated that the church – the ecclesia – goes far beyond the buildings we have claimed as our own. Our church buildings are vessels that have incubated and grown much of our witness – places we cherish and love. But the true test and witness of the church today is to offer and demonstrate a love that sacrifices the need to come together for the need to care for our neighbor and the most vulnerable in the world. In many ways it is an “upside down love” – not unlike the “upside down kingdom” we claim.

There are many questions regarding how to approach this critical conversation. We are including a link to our denomination’s guidelines as a reference. It is helpful and offers additional links as resources:

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning_to_public_worship_may_2020.pdf.

915 East Gowen Avenue | Philadelphia, PA 19150 | 215.242.1400 | www.presbyphl.org

Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace
Executive Presbyter

Rev. Kevin Porter
Stated Clerk

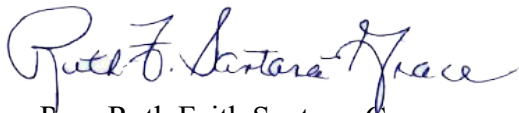
Friends, there is much we do not know about this virus – and in that uncertainty, we are called to address its challenges in real time. There are no books – no experts to turn to who can guarantee outcomes. But together as covenant communities guided by a powerful Spirit of resurrection hope, we believe we will get through this historic moment together.

At the end of the day, we are called to be prayerful and discerning about the saints with whom we have been entrusted. It is ultimately the responsibility – privilege and burden – of the session to determine when and how our individual church buildings will open.

Given the bold and creative witness so many of you have embodied, we are confident that you will be deliberate and wise as you engage this conversation. Please know that the leadership of the Presbytery is committed to walking alongside you as a conversation partner on this journey. Feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

May God bless you as you continue in your discernment. One day at a time, one step at a time, one breath at a time.

The peace of Christ be with you all.



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