

*Do not fear, for I am with you ...  
Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
Isaiah 43:5, 18-19a*

Dear EPC Members and Friends,

It is with joy that I share with you that **the church's Session approved our moving to regular indoor worship in the sanctuary, starting this Sunday, July 11 at 11 am.**

Their decision was the result of a heartfelt and thoughtful discussion that initially began with a reconsideration of using the sanctuary instead of fellowship hall as a back-up weather spot for outdoor worship. Because the sanctuary is a larger space with high vaulted ceilings and a more updated AC system, it's a better location to gather for worship inside while adhering to Covid-19 guidelines. And since the sanctuary was already being pondered as a retreat from high temps and thunderstorms (expected for the remainder of summer), a permanent move made all the more sense.

I realize that some of you have long awaited this news and others may think the move is too soon and are reluctant about worshipping indoors. That's ok. Those feelings and any others are completely valid. My prayer is that we remain tethered to one another as we keep living in the tension of what it means to be the church in a pandemic.

I am so grateful for the work of the Session (and the staff) who continue to faithfully discern the best ways to do ministry during this crisis—providing safe and innovative opportunities to connect to God through worship, education, mission, fellowship, & pastoral care. The task of navigating a pandemic remains, and I invite you to join me in expressing gratitude for their ongoing efforts and leadership.

Please note that I'm intentionally using the language of "moving indoors" in lieu of phrases like "returning" or "going back." It's a reflection of how we have constantly been worshipping God and functioning as the body of Christ, albeit through different, creative approaches. We desire to carry on with those newer practices in the upcoming weeks and months (like video recording and live streaming), so those who are unable to physically attend a service can still worship with us from afar. And we will still take advantage of cooler seasons to worship outside on occasion.

The scripture message from the prophet Isaiah reminds us that God is always doing something new and exciting in our midst—moving us jubilantly ever forward and never backward. We can't hit the reset button and magically return to February 2020 and to what life and church was like before. All we can do is forge ahead as we have been, discovering again and again the things that truly matter—family, friendships, the tenants of our faith, our spiritual identity as God's people and the freedom to express Christ's love in various forms.

Your willingness to trust in God and let the Spirit take the congregation where it needs to go over the last 14 months gives me great hope for EPC's present and

needs to go over the last 16 months gives me great hope for EUC's present and future. Your answering of God's call to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love is a blessing for our journey together as we seek to care for our neighbors no matter the challenges we encounter. It is that spirit of God's compassion and grace that will require us—as we worship in the sanctuary—to commit to:

- **Wearing masks**—ages 3 and up, regardless of vaccination status. We desire to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable. Worship leaders will remove their masks whenever they speak and/or sing. And since the data is still unclear about the safety of congregational singing inside, worshippers will be encouraged to hum and sing softly behind their masks.
- **Practicing social distancing**—with the assistance of ushers and visible signage, worshippers will be asked to sit with their family unit and/or close friends every other pew. Session has approved a capacity of 75 people to be in the sanctuary. Recognizing that our average worship attendance is 35-45, we should be able to seat members and visitors comfortably.
- **Utilizing sanitizing stations when necessary**—hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes and individual packages of tissue will be accessible at both entrances to the sanctuary for anyone who needs to use them.

In these things and so much more, let's bear witness to what God is creating anew and let's be loving participants of it.

Grace and peace,  
Rev. Andy Acton