

June 22, 2021

Dear Bethlehem Friends –

On Tuesday, June 15, New York State lifted nearly all safety-related pandemic restrictions leaving organizations to determine how they will operate. The Centers for Disease Control continues to recommend physical distancing and masking for unvaccinated people, which includes some members of the Bethlehem community who do not have access to vaccines.

Bethlehem's Re-Opening Team* met that same evening and affirmed the following plan. **Beginning Sunday, July 11 we will move to a single Sunday morning worship service at 9:30 am. The congregation is welcome to worship in person at that time, and the service will also be livestreamed.** We also agreed that:

- Reservations will not be required to attend worship; we *will* ask people to record their attendance starting July 11
- We will maintain practices that minimize touching shared surfaces (such as not passing offering plates)
- For the months of July and August, we will offer communion on the first and third Sunday of the month during worship and invite people worshipping at home to make their way to Bethlehem from 11 – 11:30 am to receive communion
- Physical distancing and wearing masks will still be required for everyone who attends (since we will be singing and there will be a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated people in our gatherings)


Please note: Our expectation of worship leaders will be that they may remove masks when they are in a leadership role *provided they are fully vaccinated* in order to enhance communication. All worship leaders will be asked to continue wearing masks when they are not speaking publicly or if they are not fully vaccinated. Bethlehem staff have been fully vaccinated and we encourage all members of the Bethlehem community to obtain vaccines in order to allow us to continue moving toward a more fulsome community gathering.

In addition to these changes in our Sunday morning worship schedule, our **church building is open to small groups who wish to use it** (capacity limits are posted in most rooms.) We ask all people to wear masks upon entering and while moving through the building. Individual groups meeting in our building can determine how they will approach masking and distancing during meeting times, honoring those most vulnerable in the group.

As we move into this new hybrid worship environment, we will continue to work to provide opportunities for engagement and leadership for those who are physically present as well as those who choose remote participation. We expect some trial and error as we learn how to do this well. By embracing this new environment over the summer months, we hope to work out most of the kinks by September.

One final note, we are grateful for a very small group of volunteers who have provided leadership for our worship livestream since the start of the pandemic and especially since October. We know this has been an important connection for many in our community. Because we have no leadership available, we will not offer a worship livestream on July 4. We will resume our worship livestream at 9:30 am on Sunday, July 11. If you are interested in offering support for this ministry to ensure it continues seamlessly in the future, please contact the Bethlehem office, or speak to one of the pastors.

In Christ –



Rick Walker
Council President



The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson
Pastor



The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman
Pastor

*Re-Opening Team members are:

Matt Beutel, Brian Edwards, Margie Gaul, Kristina Henry, Julie Owen, Bob Stolze, Rick Walker, Pastor Amy

