

“... speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” — Ephesians 4:15-16 NRSV

May 5, 2020

Beloved in Christ,

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We give thanks to God every day for the caring, courageous, adaptive ministry of the People Called Methodist around New England over these last two months of illness and isolation. We celebrate the way the church continues to live and breathe ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

We grieve with many who have lost so much; and, we give thanks for the many ways we have been able to prevent further suffering and minister to those who are enduring significant hardship. We are in this together... **because we are connected through Christ.**

In keeping with the highest calling of preserving life and honoring essential, sacrificial work, we will refrain from meeting in person for worship, retreats, Bible studies, and any other in-person church-related gatherings through **at least** Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020. We abide by this promise ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

We make this commitment acknowledging the following:

- We recognize that our Annual Conference spans states under the administration of six different governors. We understand that each governor will make recommendations based on each state’s context with regards to COVID-19. Some of these recommendations may be different from the Conference’s commitment.
- We recognize that the number of COVID-19 cases vary greatly from county to county across the Annual Conference. Some of us live in counties that have fewer than five cases, while others have thousands. Our personal and corporate experience of the need for social distancing may vary greatly in the coming weeks.
- We recognize that our ecumenical partners, independent churches, and faith communities may make decisions different from ours. Some in our local communities may begin to reopen their doors more quickly or more slowly than we do.
- We recognize that when we do begin to return to our churches and camps and places of worship, it will not be the same as it was before COVID-19. Our return will not be the great gathering of all of the people many of us have dreamed of and hoped for in this Easter season. Returning to offices and church buildings will be gradual, in phases, and not advisable for those in highest risk groups for some time.
- And, we recognize that we may have to take steps back if the virus resurges in the future.

As we continue to improve upon the highly effective pastoral, missional, and prophetic ministries that have begun during this adaptive time, we must begin to imagine how we can integrate these practices into our in-person ministries in the future. Few of us had the time or opportunity to plan when we had to close our doors during Lent. Now, we do have the time and opportunity to plan well for next steps.

We can use this month to gather good information and intentionally plan how we will re-open our buildings and come together in the future in the healthiest and most life-giving ways. We must take care to be as inclusive as possible in our planning for the day when we can begin to gather in person. The Bishop's re-entry team will be providing resources for this purpose. We do this together ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

In this Easter season as we embrace the promise of the resurrection and watch for a re-kindling of the anticipated gift of the Holy Spirit, we remember now as ever that Christ is walking with us and that we are not alone. We are never alone when we earnestly pray for one another. Keep praying ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

In the words of John Wesley, "The best of all is, God is with us!" With God's help, we can see this through ... **because we are connected through Christ.**

In Christ's love,
Members of the Extended Cabinet

We begin with a series of questions to help guide your planning process:

[Find that document here](#)