

From: **First Presbyterian** <pres.first@gmail.com>

Date: Sat, Jun 6, 2020 at 10:02 AM

Subject: A letter from the pastor

My Friends in Faith,

Early in his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul says:

“...God is my witness, *how I long for all of you* with the compassion of Christ Jesus.” How I long for you! Each week, as we record worship, the emptiness of that sanctuary tugs at my heart. I remember you always in my prayers as your faces come to my mind, and I pray that we will continue to learn what it means to be a community of Christ-followers even when we are dispersed.

In mid-March, in a desire to protect our congregation and assist health-care workers, we ceased to meet for corporate worship. We have since learned how worship, and especially group singing, are particularly dangerous. Lent dragged on, Easter came and went. Again and again I hoped we might safely gather- and have been disappointed.

I am reading constantly: things from pastors, guidelines from the county, from our governor, from public health specialists. I read about practices of other churches. I study guidance from medical professionals. Worship committee has discussed this, so has Session. Not a day goes by that we are not searching for safe ways to be together. But it seems that the time is not yet.

Our county has said some faith communities may gather, provided they follow specific guidance- which would change many things we cherish: Singing. Communion. Being able to sit where we wish. Being able to welcome all who may come, without screening questions or limiting to 100 people. Offering. Hymnals. Paper bulletins. Greeting others. Coffee hour. (to name a few).

This letter is to let you know that unless something changes, we will not gather as a whole congregation until September 2020 at the earliest. This saddens me, but it is a relief. It helps me stop wondering every week: When? When? When???

Many of our church family are at high risk because of age or pre-existing health condition. We want to wait until all may safely gather.

As businesses re-open and people have more contacts, we may see more cases of Covid-19 in our area. We want to be sure we are not part of a second wave of infections.

Meanwhile, we have NOT stopped being the church the Spirit calls us to be! We are doing food distribution, worship, and meetings to get work done. We are repairing a roof, keeping the books balanced, and maintaining communication by email and our online presence. Fellowship groups and choir and PW are meeting by Zoom, and we are extending pastoral care by notes and calls and texts and email. We are partnering for new ventures to help neighbors. We have continued to pay staff. We are more than our space and our buildings!

If you have questions, please feel free to email us at [Pres.first@gmail.com](mailto:Pres.first@gmail.com). If you are in need of pastoral care or other support, please email [fpcsnb@gmail.com](mailto:fpcsnb@gmail.com)

The creative and surprising Spirit of God is still with us. May we follow faithfully into new territory as we love one another in new ways.

Longing for you,  
Sandy Tice