



The Cathedral Church  
of Saint Paul  
*A House of Prayer for All*

June 30, 2020

Dear cathedral community and friends of the cathedral,

Worship shapes us. Our rich liturgical tradition offers us movement, touch, smells, songs, symbols, tastes, and an ordering of space that together give us a glimpse of the beloved community God envisions for the world. Our worship should embody our values and form us to live into those values when the worship service ends. Our worship should be an expression of God's love, Jesus's welcome, and divine justice.

Being unable to gather together physically for worship during this season of pandemic has been and continues to be hard. We miss seeing one another in 3D! We miss passing the peace, receiving blessed bread and wine, and belting out our favorite hymns while a grand procession moves forward. We miss coffee hour.

But it is important that we not rush back to worship in the cathedral in a way that deforms us rather than forms us for Christ's service. We will be ready to return when we can manifest the love, the welcome, and the justice of Jesus.

In the meantime, we are finding new ways to bring alive those values of love, welcome, and justice in worship. Almost all the regular attendees of Sunday worship and the Crossing are participating in these gatherings. We are offering several services every week via Zoom, where we can see and hear one another, be greeted by name, and include many voices. Our preachers and presiders are at home, just like everyone else, and on Sundays, the MANNA community, gathered at the cathedral, are full participants in our worship. A whole new community has grown up around our weekday morning prayer by conference call, which makes worship accessible to those without computers at home.

Our diocesan guidelines allow for re-gathering in person for worship after July 1st, once congregations have laid careful plans to do so safely, in consultation with a trained "re-gathering shepherd" and with the approval of Bishop Gates. Details of this process can be found [here](#). Note that in-person worship of any kind for the foreseeable future would require everyone to be masked and 6 feet apart. Re-gathered congregations are not allowed to sing, to pass the peace, or to receive Holy Communion.

Last week I gathered with the pastoral staff of the cathedral, as well as lay leaders from the Crossing and the Sunday congregation, to determine whether to initiate the process toward re-gathering for worship at the cathedral. **We have decided that we are not called to re-gather until at least late September, because we cannot do so in a way that embodies the values at the core of our faith: love, welcome, and justice.**

- Most of our community members come to the cathedral via public transportation and/or are in high-risk categories for contracting covid-19. Encouraging our people to worship together at the cathedral right now is not Christ-like love.
- Limiting the number of people in the sanctuary for worship would require a system of people making reservations ahead of time or, alternatively, being turned away once the space is full. This is not Christ-like welcome.
- A cathedral is, by its vocation, a place where tourists, visitors, and all sorts of people whom we had not expected come through the doors. Christ calls us to make room for all, to add chairs, to make the circle wider whenever we worship. But the protocols for safe worship limit the number of people we can have in the space. To hold worship for us, without welcoming them, is neither true to our calling nor welcoming.
- Right now, the MANNA community is using the sanctuary on Sunday mornings to provide essential services to those without other places to receive them. We pray that as the city reopens, the services they are receiving will be broadly available to them. But for now, they are not. Drinking fountains are still shut off, libraries are still closed, the visitor's center bathroom is not open, and meal programs are curtailed. To displace the MANNA community on Sundays in order to pray for the homeless and God's justice would be hypocritical and deforming. It is neither just nor loving nor welcoming.

Therefore, for now, we shall continue to gather for worship online and on the phone. We are making plans, also, to be able to livestream our worship once we do re-gather in the space, so that people who cannot make it to the cathedral can join us from near and far.

For those who yearn to be together in person:

We will be offering monthly social gatherings off-site - in parks or other outdoor sites - not on a Sunday morning. Studies are showing that being outdoors with others is much safer than being indoors. These will be occasions when those who are healthy and feel safe enough to do so can gather - 6 feet apart and with masks, of course! - to have fellowship and perhaps listen to some music together. We may say a prayer, but these will not be advertised, public worship services. Fellowship!

For those who yearn to be in the space of the cathedral, who miss their spiritual home:

- Brief spoken devotionals and organ voluntaries from the cathedral will be included in our Friday night Zoom compline services. This will allow you to see the spaces and symbols, the icons and the pillars that you associate with worship and that have given you strength and a sense of "home."
- Those who are healthy and willing to travel to the cathedral might consider volunteering with the Ministry of the Steps this summer. The ministry is mostly outside (so safer than indoors) and will center around voter registration and giving out pre-packaged lunches to children, as part of Boston SummerEats. We will also be welcoming people in very small batches - up to 6 at a time - to come into the sanctuary, to walk the labyrinth or pray.

Thank you for reading this long letter! I felt it important to be clear about the theological grounding of our decisions. I would be very glad to talk with you if you have further questions. Later in the summer, we will need a few more people to join our “Re-Gathering Team” to coordinate the process of making plans for re-gathering safely down the road. Please be in touch if you are interested in that ministry.

This is a hard but holy season, and I am so thankful for the mutual forbearance and spirit of trust and hope with which the Sunday congregation, the Crossing, and the MANNA community are walking through it, each supporting one another and finding creative ways to praise God, support those in need, and reflect prayerfully. And I hold a vision of the day when these congregations, as well as the Chinese congregation, La Misa, and the Muslim prayer group can all re-gather in our space.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy". The script is cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

(The Very Rev.) Amy McCreath

Dean, Cathedral Church of St. Paul