



June 4, 2020

Dear Partners in Ministry,

On June 3, 2020, the Leadership Council met to bring forward recommendations to offer our churches guidance on opening their facilities for in-person worship. National Capital Presbytery spreads across many jurisdictions, all with their own, similar but not identical, timelines on stages of returning to public gatherings. These timelines are helpful for churches considering a return to their buildings. Even though each stage has clear guidelines on how to minimize the risk of spreading the virus, the risk is still present. We have already seen churches and places of worship from other parts of the country that have re-opened their facilities, implemented the best practices to prevent the spread of the virus, and STILL had an outbreak among their congregants. We don't want that to happen to any of our churches.

The Leadership Council agreed that our churches should not be in a hurry to re-open their facilities for in-person worship even though our jurisdictions are allowing it. To sum it up in an unofficial position; "why rush?". One of the churches represented on The Leadership Council will not open their facilities for worship until Ash Wednesday of 2021. All our churches have found a way to continue to gather for worship over these past 3 months and the overwhelming majority have grown their engagement.

We want our churches to build on the energy and momentum they currently have rather than rush to return to in person gatherings. We encourage all our churches to use the resources provided by the presbytery to add the ministry of small group gathering, in-person or over a digital platform, to enhance opportunities for engagement. Find those resources here: <https://thepresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NCP-Small-Group-Devotionals.pdf>

Friends, our churches have never "closed". The church is not a facility or a building but the gathering of God's people.
1 Corinthians 3:16-17

I'd like to share words from a colleague of mine who, like all of you, is trying their best to navigate the needs and safety of the people God has called us to minister to . . .

Something about opening churches right now.

I should say "church campuses" ... I, like so many pastors, am so proud of how my church has remained "open" to love, prayer, service, and hope during this time of disruption.

When it comes to the campus, I liken it to a roller coaster at a theme park.

When I sit in the coaster and think about how dangerous it will be to be spun around and upside down, I remind myself that the “people in charge” at the theme park have a lot at stake and would never put me in a position to be hurt or killed. I trust that they have done their homework and I can enjoy the ride. It doesn’t bother me when they go through their safety protocols before they send me off - checking my seat belt and lap bar - because I know it is in my best interest.

Many people have the same feeling about going to church. Pastors love their church folks.

We know that they know that. We know that if we open the church, people will assume that we know the ride is ready and the protocols are set so that everyone is safe. With the way that things change with this pandemic minute by minute, who can say that right now?

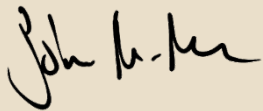
When the campus is opened, we invite the churchgoer, like the thrill-seeker on a coaster, into a relationship of trust. “The ‘people in charge (pastor, session, board, etc.),’ would never put me in a position to be hurt or killed.”

It would be so much easier on all pastors and staff if we were on a ‘normal’ church schedule right now, trust me. I cannot tell you how many ways this would make life easier.

But the image I cannot get out of my mind are the faces of the people - especially older folks - who might get ready for church on a Sunday morning, trusting that I know something about it being safe for the “ride to run” ... when, in fact, I don’t.

It won’t always be this way.

I am willing to be patient for a while longer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John Molina-Moore
NCP, General Presbyter