

Dear Friends,

We last met in person for Meeting for Worship on March 8, 2020. The closing of the meeting house has weighed heavily on our hearts over these many months. The persistence of risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic has been daunting. Caution has been guided by love and concern for the health and safety of all in our Quaker community. Management of the meeting house has included strictly limiting access to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to the resident and the few others who must occasionally enter the meeting house.

The Ministry & Worship Committee has responsibility to make a recommendation to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business about when and how to reopen the meeting house for in-person worship. For months, the committee has been in consultation with the Buildings and Grounds, Hospitality, Children and Youth Religious Education, and Finance committees. We continue to watch for information about other Friends Meetings who are facing the same public health conditions. We continue to pay close attention to recommendations from Orange County, the Governor and the Centers for Disease Control as well as suggestions by members of our Meeting community. Uncertainty about when and how risk will diminish leads to continued caution. Public efforts to widely distribute vaccinations are encouraging and may be the key to safe resumption of face-to-face worship.

The risk factors related to worship in the meeting room include transmission of the virus indoors, with ventilation a factor, in addition to masking and distancing. Bathrooms are enclosed spaces that could harbor the virus. Risk is lower outdoors where air circulates freely, where masking and distancing are still advised for public health.

While current rules and guidelines would permit an indoor gathering of a few people, Ministry & Worship has not been led to accept the current level of risk as low enough for reopening the meeting house and resuming in-person activities.

Although conditions are not yet favorable for in-person activities, with optimism we can begin planning. The following need to be considered in our planning:

- The health risk for the meeting house resident.
- Risk of severe illness for vulnerable members and attenders.
- The value of enabling our community to worship together, online, in person, or in some combination.
- Reopening of the meeting house may be achievable sooner if there is a combination of in-person attendance on a gradual basis, a high level of vaccination, and online participation using our Zoom technology.
- Online participation, combined with in-person attendance, will require a modest investment to equip the meeting house with adequate connectivity to Zoom and effective audio and visual elements.
- Advance notice to Buildings & Grounds well before resumption of any in-person activity.

The Ministry & Worship Committee asks our community to take time to sit with these considerations. Acknowledging uncertainties in public health conditions, personal risks, and outcomes for widespread vaccinations, please think about

- (a) your preference for your own participation,
- (b) your preference for our community,
- (c) how participation could be managed effectively, and
- (d) what questions need to be answered in discussion.

We invite your thoughts and questions via email to ministryandworship@chapelhillfriends.org

Ministry & Worship Committee would like to share observations about online worship via Zoom, with gratitude for information and technical support from the Zoom working group. Clearly, spiritual deepening and discernment are more challenging online, and we hear the words “Zoom” and “fatigue” used in the same sentence. Yet, in response to a survey and in conversation, we have learned that the Zoom platform enables participation in Forum, Meeting for Worship, and Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business by Friends who live far away, or who cannot travel easily or at all. Online gatherings also enable Friends with hearing issues to adjust the audio on their devices to hear better than they might in person. Online worship via Zoom may not be ideal, but it is the best we can do for now.

Ministry & Worship Committee is grateful for your attention and your patience with worship during this pandemic.

February 21, 2021

Ministry & Worship Committee

Jeff Brown, clerk, Madelyn Ashley, Alice Carlton, Matt Drake, Carolyn White and Chris Stanley,
ex officio