

First Church Reopening Timeline

At its August 24 meeting the Executive Council had a thorough discussion about use of the First Church facility for worship and church programming as well as community, college, and conservatory activities. The Council decided, given what we know at this time that we will not return to in person worship prior to January 1, 2021. The Council then weighed the possibility of others using the building before that time and determined that there cannot be any use of the facility for any purpose prior to November 1, 2020. This decision was primarily based upon three factors:

It is difficult to justify opening the church facility up to the wider community when we are currently denying use of the facility to the congregation who envisioned, underwrote, and at times physically assisted with the recent renovations.

Construction is still underway in the building including replacing floor coverings in all hallways and new roofing for the James Brand House (building between the historic Meeting House and the Fellowship Hall). The flooring work involves some asbestos abatement and until flooring and roofing work is completed we are trying to minimize tracking of debris into newly renovated spaces.

Perhaps most importantly, we are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 and feel that at this time the First Church facility needs to remain closed to all but essential workers (office staff, construction workers) for both the safety of those who work within First Church as well as the wider community.

Once the flooring and roofing projects are completed (approx. Nov. 1) we will notify the congregation so that individuals and households can schedule time to tour the building and reconnect with the congregation's sacred space.

Extending the time of building closure was a challenging decision for the Executive Council particularly given the recent renovations which were intentionally designed to address both First Church specific needs as well use of our facility by the wider community. We all miss gathering together as a congregation for worship and fellowship and are anxious to return to spaces that nourish our faith and draw us closer to God and to one another.

Of course, should there be a significant diminishment in the danger of COVID-19 transmission the Executive Council may revisit its decision. We deeply lament the need to severely limit access to First Church but look forward to a day when we can once again open our doors to the congregation as well as the wider community and extend a warm welcome to all into our newly renovated facility.

Mike Schmid, Moderator & David Hill, Pastor