



# THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

*Transforming Lives and Communities*

*Go therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost:  
Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20a*

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*Rev. Dr. Mary Day Miller, Executive Minister*

*Rev. Gary Ludwig, President*

20 May 2020

Dear TABCOM Family,

You are no doubt aware that Governor Baker has released his phased re-opening guidelines for the state of Massachusetts. Churches are now permitted to hold public worship, within certain strict and limited guidelines. [http://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Places-of-Worship\\_Circular-Checklist\\_Eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0wJTYXeQKDvfUYRyShEPeK-Bw32DYr8uQHNxBHOLczJCz-eu\\_MRplzRSA](http://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Places-of-Worship_Circular-Checklist_Eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0wJTYXeQKDvfUYRyShEPeK-Bw32DYr8uQHNxBHOLczJCz-eu_MRplzRSA)

“All things are lawful for me’, but not all things are beneficial,” we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 6:12. So, while we have been told that we may return to our buildings, that does not necessarily mean that we should.

Because we are Baptists, each church will make its own decision about the timetable for return to public worship. I want to take this opportunity to implore you not to rush this process, or to cut corners in implementing the guidelines. PLEASE, please do not pressure your pastor or other church leaders toward a rapid re-opening of your building. Because boundaries can be relaxed much more easily than they can be tightened, let us begin with the commitment to follow the guidelines fully and completely.

There is a well-documented scientific consensus that the most dangerous situations for contracting COVID-19 are those in which people share an enclosed space for an extended period of time: exactly what happens in our worship services. Speaking (and even more so, singing) propels the virus further than just breathing. To be blunt, gathering of groups of people for worship in other states have been occasions for COVID-19 transmission.

It is difficult to suggest a building re-opening date that can be applied to all of our churches. Each of you is dealing with your own unique local regulations, building size and configuration, and congregational size/demographics. I can share with you that colleagues in the UCC are suggesting virtual worship “through the end of summer.” Several TABCOM churches are following similar timetables. Others are electing to wait until at least “Phase 3,” which will be no sooner than early July. In every case, we will need to prepare for the likelihood of future shutdowns if outbreaks occur.

One of our mandates as Christians is to “love our neighbor.” To love as Jesus loved, we must always put the needs of others ahead of our own, and especially the needs of the most vulnerable among us. None of us wants to find ourselves facing the tragedy of an outbreak from our church building or the loss of any of our precious senior saints.

Finally, let me emphasize that we are talking about re-opening church buildings. “The Church” has never been closed. I am amazed at all that our churches have been doing during this pandemic, including dynamic virtual worship and creative community ministry. I am proud to be your Executive Minister!

If any of our TABCOM staff can be of assistance in your re-opening process, please do not hesitate to call. We are praying for you!

Serving Christ,

*Rev. Mary D. Miller*