



Dr. Stephen D. McConnell
Senior Pastor

Dr. Hmingiliani Browne
Congregational Life Pastor

Pam Gillespie
Executive Director of Operations

Rev. Laurie Haas
Family Life Pastor

September 1, 2020

Dear friends:

What a great day we shared at Church of the Palms this past Sunday! Nearly 350 of us along with 40 dogs and a few cats participated in the first (and we hope only) Fall Kick-off Drive-thru! It was a great day of seeing familiar faces (or eyes, anyway) and experiencing our theme for the year -- the Fruit of the Spirit. Folks drove away with ample resources to begin their journey through the year. Many thanks to our volunteers and staff for their hard work and creative spirit! Many, of course, needed to remain home and we most certainly understand. We are all feeling the tug of COVID in different ways – some feel pulled to stay close to home and others feel pulled to resume contact. Such is the season we're in.

As you remember we postponed our previous reopening date in the face of a large spike in the spread of the disease. We have taken advantage of this time to begin several campus projects, including renovations of the Campus Center, Chapel and Sanctuary.

Presently, the downward direction of the virus is encouraging. As I write this letter, thousands of Sarasota Public School students are returning to school to begin the year.

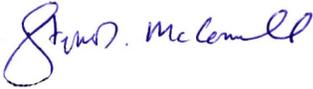
We are ready to move forward! We still have a few more steps to ready our campus for the return of in-person corporate worship (completion of the Sanctuary chancel renovation, moving the Food Pantry back to its original location, etc.) and thus it is necessary to push back our re-opening date just a couple of weeks to **October 11**. We want to be fully ready! On that date we are excited to say that we will be able to invite you to our regular worship schedule – 9:00 Sanctuary, 10:00 Campus Center and 11:00 Sanctuary. Since we will be practicing social distancing our capacity will be limited at each service, thus we will require you to pre-register for the service of your choice. Masks will be required – no exceptions except for small children. The service will be well under an hour and will include meditative music (no singing), prayers and the week's sermon.

Since our priority is to serve our entire congregation and to honor those who need to remain home, each week we will still pre-record both our traditional and contemporary services (complete with hymns, singing, children's moment, anthems) so that those who are unable to attend on campus can do so online on Sunday morning. No one need miss out on the full Church of the Palms worship experience. *(over please)*

We will do all we can to include the entire church family in our congregational life whether remotely or on campus.

More details will follow, but we are so grateful for your patience and support during this time. We will continue down uncharted waters, but are grateful that our Lord is with us in the boat! We look forward to October 11 when we can see your eyes again!

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen D. McConnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephen D. McConnell