BELOVED CHURCH FAMILY,

I pray that you are doing well and hanging in there during this difficult time apart. I’m writing this letter a little early this month because my family and I will be taking a much-needed time of rest from May 25-June 1. On Sunday, May 31, we will not be having our regular Facebook Live Worship. Instead, you will be blessed with a pre-recorded Pentecost Service from Bishop Devadhar and the Cabinet of the New England Annual Conference. This will be uploaded on our Facebook page and website. I know many of you are eager to get back to in-person worship services; especially those of you who do not have computer access to watch our online services. I also know that others of you are still desiring to stay home and not risk an in-person gathering even though you miss worshipping with others in person. After reviewing the CDC, WHO, and Maine Government recommendations as well as the New England Annual Conference guidelines, we will NOT be returning to in-person worship for the foreseeable future. Our Harbor Church Coordinating Team (members of Calvary UMC and Bolsters Mills UMC) will be reviewing the New England Annual Conference guidelines (you can find them at this link: http://www.neumc.org/virus-reentry) and taking steps to delegate their implementation as we move forward. The document from the New England Annual Conference is long and thorough, but here are some examples:

• No one over the age of 65 AND no one with high-risk medical conditions (asthma, high blood pressure, autoimmune disorders, etc.) should attend in-person worship at least until there is a vaccine and 95% effective treatment

• All persons attending in-person worship must wear masks and remain 6 ft apart (this means roping off pews to be able to distance ourselves)

• All Hymnals and Bibles must be removed from pews to prevent spreading of germs

• No singing or unison prayers (it has been shared by experts in the medical and musical field that group singing is as dangerous as everyone sneezing repeatedly at the same time)

• No fellowship time

• Bathrooms would need to be sanitized after every individual use.

This is a lot to take in. There is grief and frustration about what church once was, and fear about what it will become. When I became your Pastor, I had no idea this is what we would all be facing. However, I find hope and strength in that we are facing it together. The most important thing right now is for us to make sure everyone in our community is safe. One of Methodist founder John Wesley’s rules is to “Do No Harm” and until we can guarantee that no harm will be done from gathering in person, we will not be reopening for in-person worship. This does not mean we cannot still be the Church! I have been blown away by the amazing witness of love and faith that you have all shared by praying for one another, by calling and checking in on the most vulnerable in our congregation, by showing up for birthday parades, by sending cards, and more. Thank you for still being the Church even though our building might be closed. I also want to thank you for still giving faithfully and honoring your pledges during this time. When you offer what you have been blessed with, you become a blessing for others. As we continue to be the church remotely, I want to offer you ways to still connect through worship and fellowship. During the month of June, we will be celebrating the Holy Spirit through a special sermon series where we explore the ways the Spirit has moved in and among people throughout Scripture as well as how she continues to move today. We will also celebrate and honor the sacredness of the LGBTQIA+ community through a special Pride Sunday Worship on June 28th. Below you will find the ways to connect with us (including a new Call-in option for Worship!) as well as the Worship at Home Kit for June. As always you are in my prayers, and I encourage you to call/text me at 613-5134 should you have any pastoral needs.

In Christ’s Love, Pastor Annie