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## *When Will We Open?*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by Dean Sam Candler**

Yes, I know. I know we are eager to return to something like the daily routines and habits we knew, say, before Lent 2020 began on February 26!

And we are eager to be able to attend church freely and safely on Sundays and weekdays! Believe me, I am eager, too. I do not need to rehearse with you what this pandemic isolation and quarantine has been like.

Now, as Pentecost 2020 dawns upon us, it is apparent that many of us have begun our own processes of re-engaging. We are wary, yes. We are careful and apprehensive. We are being safe. But many of us have enlarged our circle, having dinners with extended family members, and socializing with closer friends who share our habits. We are driving around and traveling. I believe that slow and careful re-engagement is good. Yes, there may well be more pop-ups of Covid-19. But my sense is that most of our country can better handle those cases at this point. It is good to carefully re-engage.

So, our inevitable question and challenge is this: when can we return to worship in the Cathedral? Every leader among us—whether religious or secular—has an opinion! And, there will be lots of ways to re-engage. Well, here at the Cathedral, we will gravitate to the safer and more careful ways. No matter what the authorities among us allow, or even urge, my own counsel has been to take it easy. Even when the time comes that we can permit parishioners to worship inside the Cathedral, I know that many parishioners will simply not want to jump back into close contact.

There are at least two reasons to be slow and careful about re-engaging in-person worship at the Cathedral. The first (obviously, I hope), is safety and the common good. The Cathedral of St. Philip stands for safety and wellness! Some of you know that the word “salvation” comes from the word “salve,” which means “be well!” (It is why healing ointment is called “salve.”) Well, the Cathedral stands for salvation and being well! There are lots of ways to work for salvation in the world, and “Social Distance For The Common Good” is still helping people be well, helping people with salvation.

The second reason to be slow and careful about re-engaging in-person worship is that our church is already open! We have not been closed since March 15. We have just been experiencing spiritual communion and mission in a different way. No one needs to tell us to open back up! We, each of us, have been bringing in the kingdom of God, and serving Christ, in our own ways, wherever we are. Indeed, our mission has never been simply to go to church on Sundays. Our mission has been to restore all people to God and each other, and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, wherever we are! Our classical and traditional and liturgical “in-person worship” has always been about enabling that mission.

We are fortunate, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, that our online worship services have been quite gladly and heartily received. I find myself praying online with you every Sunday – not just watching church! We are seeing and hearing each other –not just the clergy, but so many faithful parishioners! And I have heard from so many who have truly been encouraged and blessed by our offerings. I am so glad! It is not the same as in-person worship; I know that. But we are doing well. We are communicating the gospel, we are preaching the good news, we are teaching Christ, we are praying and even singing, and we are serving others, in ways that build up the Body of Christ.

Even if there was some process by which we could re-engage in-person worship at the Cathedral with all sorts

of restrictions and conditions – say, with masks on, or with pews marked off so that we used only 50% of our space, or with online reservations only—I am not sure what all that would accomplish. We would be seeing and experiencing our holy space, for sure. And, more importantly, we would be seeing and experiencing each other! It is, after all, WE who are the Body of Christ. We want to see and experience each other!

But the conditions and restrictions of our in-person re-engagement might well be more discouraging than edifying. With the canons and the chapter of the Cathedral, I am evaluating safe possibilities for all sorts of things – just as each of you are doing for your own lives and households.

But the answer, right now, is that I do not know. I do not know when, or how, we will return to in-person worship at the Cathedral of St. Philip. I do know that when we do, I want it to be safe, and I want it to be real. It will not be simply because we can, with conditions that are too awkward and burdensome. And, of course, it will not be because we are making some sort of perceived political statement. It will be because we discern that in-person worship will help build up the Body of Christ and help bring in the kingdom of God. That is our mission. Pray for us!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip