Dear LSS community

As I described in my message last week, the Rabbi, Tamar and I have established a committee to discuss the practical, logistical, and medical questions surrounding the re-opening of the shul to religious services and other activities.

While there are several practical challenges, we are still in the process of resolving (e.g. around security, safety procedures, availability of testing and sanitation equipment, signage, etc.), there is early alignment around some key areas, and I wanted to share those with you:

As we have said in several prior communications, we intend to err on the side of caution. While the regulations will permit religious gatherings of up to 10 people as early as June 4th, we do not feel that the shul is ready to do so safely.

Assuming all goes smoothly with our planning, we do not intend to open up to our first service any earlier than Tuesday June 9th (and, even then, we will not do so if we do not feel that we have the necessary safety and security measures in place).

Currently in New York State, gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited. While we hope that this number will be raised soon, we do not know when that will be. We are painfully aware that commencing religious gatherings now, with only 10 people allowed to attend, effectively means that only men may attend. As a shul deeply committed to inclusion of women and men in Tefillah, we were presented with a painful dilemma - whether to open for Minyanim now, i.e., with men only, or to remain closed until we are able to hold services of more than 10 people and, therefore, include women as well. On balance, and after much deliberation, we have decided that we will begin Minyanim next week, with a commitment to allow the inclusion of women as soon as it is legal to have more than 10 people at one service.

We intend to re-open to services in a slow and deliberate manner. Think of it as a pilot for us to assess our planning to maintain the security of the building while observing the logistics of participants entering and exiting the building. This means the following:

Services will be held ONLY outdoors, i.e. on the Spira Family Terrace.

In line with current regulations, we will limit the service to 10 participants, including the Rabbi and/or gabbai.

All services will require social distancing, the use of masks, and for participants to bring their own books and/or religious items. Participants will also be asked on-site to undergo a quick-scan temperature check before attending the Minyan.

We will begin with weekday services – no Shabbat services for the time being.

We will begin with a single, daily mincha/maariv service – to be held Sunday through Thursday (inclusive).
If all goes well logistically, we will expand to a daily shacharit service – to be held Sunday through Friday (inclusive).

If all goes well with that, we will look to expand our services to include more than one shacharit service a day and more than one mincha/maariv service a day.

Given the dependence on each of those milestones running smoothly, we cannot give you guidance as to the future dates upon which they will start.

At the beginning of each week, an email will be sent asking people to sign up if they are interested and able to attend Minyan. Priority will be given to people saying Kaddish, with Rabbi and Gabbaim managing the process.

While we are very concerned about the health of particular segments of our community – the elderly and/or immuno-compromised – we do not intend to make a blanket restriction on such participants. Rather, we will insist that potential participants discuss the risks with their health care providers and make their own judgments.

We are still assessing the logistics of running a service, but it is likely that each service will have a “minyan captain” who will be responsible for making sure that the participants adhere to the practices and code of conduct that we are formulating. This person would likely be designated for a series of services over a particular week. While this person may be a member of the clergy or a member of the ritual committee, please also use the survey to indicate if you would be willing and able to make such a commitment and play such a role if called upon.

Please take the time to respond to the survey, and please look out for more messaging from me and/or the committee shortly.

Alan Samuels