

November 23, 2020

Dear Friends,

As we approach Thanksgiving, the families of our congregations are re-evaluating their holiday plans and many are deciding that, for the sake of their loved ones and the larger community, not to gather in the ways we have always done. That is not an easy decision, but with rising COVID positivity rates across our state, it is a faithful and loving decision. The church family is no different.



We think that the rapid increase in the spread of the virus we are seeing in Ohio and across the country warrants that we make the recommendation that **our congregations consider suspending indoor gathered worship until your particular county returns to Level I in the Ohio Public Health Advisory System.**

You can monitor that rate on the Ohio Department of Health Department's website <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/public-health-advisory-system>

The cancellation of in-person worship does not necessarily mean that all events in the congregation's life should also be suspended. Food pantries that serve the poor may need to continue to provide support to our neighbors. Different decisions may need to be made regarding pre-schools and daycares hosted in our buildings, as well as other events that bring together smaller groups of persons. But our worship life may unknowingly put some or all of us at increased risk.

Since March, our congregations have discovered that they can stay connected "virtually" using Facebook, Zoom, and YouTube. Some have pre-recorded their services and some have "live streamed" from their sanctuary. If your church live streams, we would encourage you to do that with the fewest persons possible gathered.

If you decide to continue, or resume, your worship services, encourage the most at-risk people in your congregation to stay home. That includes people over 60, people with heart, kidney, or lung disease, and those with chronic respiratory conditions. And continue to observe the safe practices of wearing facemasks, social distancing, and avoid touching, congregating, sharing materials, and singing.

The news of vaccine developments is promising and builds our hope that this challenge will come to an end. We pray for patience as we move through the coming months, and for the health and safety of all God's children in every nation.

Blessings on you and your congregation,

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