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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Stay Safe by Practicing Religion and Spirituality from Home**

OSHKOSH, WI (April 8, 2020) – On March 24, 2020, Governor Evers issued a [Safer at Home order](#), directing Wisconsinites to stay at home in order to slow the spread of COVID-19. This order is in effect until Friday, April 24, 2020, or until a superseding order is issued.

Safer at Home allows individuals to leave their homes for limited essential activities, including shopping for groceries, obtaining medicine and caring for a family member in another household. Essential businesses and operations are also allowable, though physical distancing and other safety measures are required to keep employees and customers safe.

The order does not allow for gatherings of more than 10 people in a room or confined space at a time. **A confined space is not only limited to indoor gatherings, but also includes any defined space, including parking lots and festival grounds. This includes religious gatherings, drive-in services, weddings and funerals. Parking lot services, even if people remain in their vehicles, are prohibited by the Safer at Home order.** Any gathering with fewer than 10 people must still adhere to physical distancing requirements by staying at least six feet from others and staying home if you are sick. It is also important to limit gatherings only to people living within the same household to avoid transmitting the virus through social networks.

Physical distancing is our only defense against this virus. Community, faith- and spiritual-based organizations have an important role in slowing the spread of COVID-19, especially among high-risk populations. These organizations often nobly serve those who are most vulnerable, including people with heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes. These community members are at higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 illness.

“This is a challenging time for all, and we have to make sacrifices for a little while to protect the health of our community,” said Doug Gieryn, Winnebago County Public Health Department Director and Health Officer. “For many in our communities, coming together to practice our religious and spiritual beliefs provides hope, strength and social connectedness. We look forward to the day we can again allow in-person gatherings to take place. In the meantime, we ask that you stay connected with one another through phone calls, video chats, text messages and other ways.”

Religious and spiritual leaders should continue to stay up-to-date on information related to the pandemic and actively disseminate accurate and timely information. This includes developing information-sharing systems with partners, including local health officials, and communicating this information to regular attendees, people being served by the organization, and the broader community.

Thankfully, with modern technology there are many creative options available for staying connected and nurturing spiritual health during this challenging time. Many churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other places of worship are offering services through television, radio, podcasts and livestreams on the internet.

“Individually, and as families, taking time to be mindful, meditate and pray is important for spiritual health while we all do our part to keep our community safe by staying safer at home,” says Gieryn.

We sympathize with congregants of faith- and spiritual-based organizations that miss the services and fellowship, but the goal is to keep everyone safe and healthy by following the practices put in place by the Safer at Home order.

For questions or concerns, contact the Winnebago County Health Department’s COVID-19 hotline at 920-232-3026. For up-to-date information, please frequently monitor the Winnebago County Health Department [website](#) and [situation updates](#), the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services website](#), and the [CDC website](#).

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