

Coronavirus, Weddings, Funerals, those most cherished and sacred moments in our lives . . .

Scot and I have been wondering how you are preparing to respond to questions about conducting weddings and funerals (both normally large gatherings) as we live in this time of limiting numbers to ten or less. Yesterday, as I listened to Governor DeWine, one of the news media asked about such events and his recommendation to the public. His response was similar to our own. He encouraged both of these events being very small gatherings, with the larger celebrations and gathering rescheduled at later dates. Here is our response as well.

The reality of hosting much smaller gatherings for weddings and funerals, even perhaps postponing them, is hard, emotionally difficult on everyone, and very inconvenient. Funeral homes may not be hosting services. People will then want to move them to our churches. We feel caught between keeping people safe and wanting to be Christ's love to those in need, especially those who will be grieving their loved one's death and feeling no closure.

I suggest that when a family needs a pastor to offer care and consolation at a time of death, offer a "family only" short graveside service of God's love and grace. Encourage the social distancing space at the service. Then look ahead several months on your calendar and set a time for a Memorial Service at the church. Offer all the hospitality you can when it happens at a later date and celebrate through worship and around a feast.

When my Mom died September 10, 2018 we had family from all over the country who wanted to come. We couldn't find a date that worked until one of my sisters said, "Why not Thanksgiving weekend?" Two and a half months after her death, we had a Memorial Service. Because we waited every one of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren were present. Our grief was less intense. Our joy was more abundant because we were all present. The time to address this concern of no large gatherings for celebrations of life is now, prior to the next phone call that a member has died. Communication with clarity and with options is best if we do it today.

The same may be true for weddings as well. Our churches need to check the calendar and review when your weddings are scheduled. You may need to inform those who have scheduled weddings in the next few months that the number of people will be limited to close family and a few friends limiting that number to ten as strongly recommended by the CDC and our government leaders. Scot's son will be getting married early summer. They are still hoping things will be much better by then. He said to me that those of you who have spring weddings on your calendar may want to be proactive and have a conversation with the wedding couple now. Encourage them to call their wedding halls and venues about cancellation policies, deposits, conversations with caterers and reimbursements should they need to postpone their reception. These are good pastoral conversations to have now with the wedding couple and their families. Let them know the where the church is at currently on no large gatherings and that you will keep them informed. Once we are past the Coronavirus we will celebrate in many ways.

We are living in an unprecedented time and we are responsible for being a part of a world community to help keep people well. Sometimes that means that as the Church we make unpopular decisions. Sometimes it means we help others keep safe boundaries. And so, I invite us to "Do no harm. Do good. And stay in love with God." Peace. Grace for your ministry. Prayers for our world. Rae Lynn