

March 19, 2020

To the congregations of the Ohio District,

Greetings in the name of the rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ.

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is impacting Ohio District churches and schools in new ways seemingly on a daily basis. The changes are forcing congregational leaders to make difficult choices. This letter recommends a path forward for worship for the foreseeable future.

In order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect their citizens, the following recommendations are being made by the states that make up the Ohio District:

- While Ohio has made exemptions for religious organizations in prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people in a single space, the Ohio Department of Health strongly recommends avoiding social gatherings of more than 10 people.
- The [Kentucky Department of Public Health has recommended](#) that all faith-based organizations temporarily “postpone services and gatherings.”
- In West Virginia, the [Department of Health and Human Resources](#) has recommended that all individuals should limit social gatherings to no more than 10 people and to cancel all gatherings with more than 50 attendees.

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39 and Galatians 6:2). At the same time, we are subject to civil authorities (Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17). We also desire to make a godly witness to society (Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12).

In light of the above, it is clear that our churches and schools should take every precaution to help limit the spread of COVID-19. We do this not out of fear, but out of love and respect for our members and neighbors. For the immediate future, I am recommending congregations not gather in groups of more than 10 for worship services, instead providing alternative worship options. Examples of alternative worship options in the Ohio District include:

Live streaming the worship service

A “worship team” is formed (pastor, musician, technician) to lead the service in an empty sanctuary. The service is live streamed for viewing in homes.

Limiting worship service attendance to 10 people

A schedule is created for up to nine members to attend a service in the sanctuary. An appropriate liturgy is used, such as Corporate Confession and Absolution or Responsive Prayer. The service is brief enough to offer several on a Sunday morning. The Lord’s Supper is often being celebrated.

Delivering worship materials to members

There is a wide range of options for delivering worship materials, from uploading resources online to taking hymnals to members.

Churches choosing to hold worship services with groups larger than 10 are encouraged to take every precaution in preventing the spread of viruses. The following questions are designed to help congregational leaders make decisions for adapting worship services:

- How can we better sanitize our facilities, especially the sanctuary, narthex and restrooms?
- How can we help our members practice “social distancing” from the moment they arrive at church to the time they leave the church?
- What changes can we make to the way we celebrate Holy Communion to reassure members we are not placing them at-risk for viruses?
- How can we give our blessing to at-risk members to not attend worship services? What kind of worship experience can we provide our members who choose not to attend because they are at risk?

I plan on sending a letter with updated recommendations for worship within the next three weeks. Until then, I leave you with this encouragement from 2 Corinthians 4:

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16–18 ESV)

Trusting in Christ,



President Wilson

Informational Links

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Ohio Department of Health](#)

[Mike DeWine – Governor of Ohio](#)