

March 19, 2020

Heartland Conference Pastoral Letter #2 Regarding the COVID 19 Pandemic

Dear Pastors and Congregational Leaders in the Heartland Conference:

We write to strongly recommend that in-person worship be suspended for the foreseeable future. This is based on the following information which comes from the Governor of Ohio and the Head of the Ohio Department of Health. We realize this includes Easter Sunday and will require special planning related to many dimensions of church life.

On Thursday morning our Transitional Conference Minister, Rev. Dave Long-Higgins, was part of a call with Governor DeWine regarding COVID 19 and the life of faith communities in this extraordinary season. Here is a summary of what was shared in that conversation:

It is no secret that the pandemic caused by the COVID 19 virus is causing changes that impact us all on a daily basis. Each passing day brings greater restrictions as we are being counseled by Governor DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton, Head of the Ohio Department of Health, about what is necessary for us to avoid catastrophic growth of the virus in the wider population. As many of you have heard, there is a special concern that actions be taken now that can mitigate the overwhelming of our health systems and reduce the number of deaths over time.

- **COVID 19 is much more dangerous than originally thought.** 40-70% in the State of Ohio would eventually end up with COVID 19 if no action such as being recommended is taken. The goal is to spread this out to reduce stress on the health system. Our health care system does not have the capacity to handle this apart from the stringent adherence to the declarations of the Ohio Department of Health. The virus has been in Ohio since January.
- **This is a situation of urgent survival.** COVID 19 is 20 times more deadly than the flu. The transmission rate is 2 times higher than the flu. People may be infected and survive, but they may infect 10 other people. **The governor's advice is to cancel in-person worship services.** He cannot order this due to separation of religion and state but this is his strong recommendation. He shared, "People will die if you put people together in a room. You really need to go to virtual worship. Every time you go out there is a risk and it goes up dramatically for people over 65. The death rate is 15% if you are 80 or above."
- **The virus reproduces every 6 days. Doubling every six days.** Those over 65 years of age should not be out in public. Assistance should be offered to them regarding their meals. Governor DeWine and Dr. Acton would like us to carry the message that people in this age category need to be exceedingly careful.

- **Eventually, all child care centers will have to close.** Only centers that are serving the medical community will be allowed to remain open. The problem with daycare centers is that young people can be infected but remain without symptoms. The fear is not the infection of children but their capacity to be carriers of Covid19 hence infecting others at home.
- **COVID 19 in Ohio will likely not peak until the beginning of May.** Peaking does not mean the virus will be eradicated. It will remain as a public health concern well beyond the beginning of May. How long it remains a concern and at what level is based on how all people adhere to the recommendations of the health department now.

We are here to serve and support you. Some have reached out individually and others have connected via zoom calls. A variety of opportunities for support will be announced as we go forward. We are very interested in knowing what would be most helpful to you. Please feel free to contact any of us with your thoughts, needs, or concerns.

Faith Formation Support Resources – The Faith Formation Working Group of the Conference has developed a listing of resources for faith formation in the home setting which can be found at this link:

<http://www.heartlanducc.org/all-project-list/faith-formation-resources/>

Two Faith Formation Zoom Calls will be offered next week to share ideas and resources and offer support:

Wednesday, March 25, 2020, at 10 am – This call may be accessed by clicking on this link: <https://zoom.us/j/645950864>

Thursday, March 26, 2020, at 7 pm – This call may be accessed by clicking on this link: <https://zoom.us/j/526671007>

Resources Regarding Online Worship and Generosity/Stewardship help will soon be posted.

This is an extraordinary season of life that has not ever been experienced by any of us. What we have experienced and do experience is the power of God's love, guided by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit which takes form as each of us allows God to use us. You are a blessing to those around you. You are not alone. We hold you in our hearts and in our prayers.

Blessings and Godspeed!

Your Pastoral Partners in Ministry

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