

December 11, 2020

Eastern Regional Conference Family:

Greetings! These past few months have been trying for all of us. It seems like the next few weeks may be even more disruptive. As we move closer to the celebration of Christmas, it is becoming more clear that this will be a very unconventional season of worship.

On Thursday, December 10, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf implemented additional restrictions on social engagement in the Commonwealth. We realize that the ERC is far larger than Pennsylvania, yet we hope all of our regional churches hear the heart of the Ad Council as we provide this guidance.

Unlike the early months of COVID-19, hospitals across Pennsylvania are now seeing dangerously high spikes in cases. Intensive Care Units are becoming overburdened. The virus has crept closer to our congregations as regions that went unaffected in the early months are now being overwhelmed by cases and deaths. This virus is now very personal to many in our denomination.

All across the country amazing health care workers have been putting in long hours and their dedication is taking its toll on their well-being. As the months go by, it becomes increasingly important to honor their service and to ensure that Christians are focused on supporting these dedicated servants and the many families who have lost loved ones.

While Governor Wolf again stressed that houses of worship are life-sustaining businesses, the obligation of our Christian community is always to go the extra mile. The restrictions placed on businesses and restaurants may not formally apply to our churches, yet we understand that the intent of the restrictions is to stop the spread of a disease that has taken far too many lives. While you may not agree with every decision made by our government leaders, it is our obligation under Scripture to go the extra mile in protecting the communities we serve. Our truest form of worship does not happen in our buildings. Our truest form of worship comes when we sacrifice our personal interests and our individual will and take on God's cause to care for our neighbors.

This is a wonderful opportunity for the Church to reflect the love of Jesus. This is an opportunity for us to assist in curtailing the spread of COVID-19. We are urging our churches to suspend large gatherings and abide as much as possible to the Governor's request during this period of restriction. We urge our churches to embrace the mission of bringing the Gospel to those in need, though we may need to find new and creative ways. COVID-19 has given us all the opportunity to consider new ways to reach people in the communities we serve and love.

We realize that some congregations will continue to meet during this period. While we urge every church to wrestle with that decision, we agree that with reasonable precautions, including masking and an honest dedication to social distancing, assemblies can still take place without a significant risk of spreading the virus. Great care should be taken to ensure that we do not crowd sanctuaries in the name of worship. The truth of the Gospel cannot be experienced by placing congregations at unwise risk.

We stand ready to assist every ERC church with creative ideas to worship this Christmas season. Again, this guidance to not gather in larger groups reflects our strong desire to present the church in a manner that tells those around us that we genuinely care about their well-being. We may not be able to gather in large numbers, but we can continue to fellowship in other ways. Hopefully, our energy will be invested in positive opportunities and new avenues of praising our Lord.

On behalf of the ERC Ad Council,

Nick DiFrancesco
Executive Director