



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

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*“In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.”
(Psalm 5:3)*

*“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,
who daily bears our burdens.
Our God is a God who saves;
From the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.”
(Psalm 68:19-20)*

July 16, 2020

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World!

By now you are aware of the news conference that Gov. Tom Wolf held on July 15 with Dr. Rachael Levine, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health. They reported that there had been a significant increase in the number of new cases of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania over the past week. Medical experts are projecting that at the current trajectory, a new surge of the virus is a real possibility.

Many other states are experiencing increases in the number of new COVID-19 cases reported per day. Florida, for example, one day last week had 15,000 new cases—greater than once the highest one-day case count in New York. This pandemic is not over and the progress that has been made is being negated by a new surge.

Therefore, Gov. Wolf is resuming some restrictions. Indoor gatherings are again limited to 25 people, and outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 250. We must continue to wear face coverings and practice social distancing any time we might encounter others. We still should strictly follow all the safety protocols.

As your bishop, I strongly urge our churches to heed these limitations on gatherings. This is to slow the spread of the virus, for the sake of our worshipers and the communities outside our churches.

I know that the state has exempted religious institutions from these restrictions. However, as Christians, we must be diligent to care not only for ourselves, but for all people, especially the least and the vulnerable. It is our sacred responsibility to surpass governmental standards to keep people safe.

I realize that this is a difficult reversal, especially when many of our churches have finally reopened. Indeed, the scripture is true: “How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell together” (Psalm 133:1). However, now more than ever, we must put the health and safety of others ahead of our need and desire to gather.

Please also remember that the majority of our worshipers are in the age group that is at risk of contracting the disease. Lest we become complacent about younger people, note Dr. Levine’s observation that at the start of the pandemic: COVID-19 affected mostly people ages 19 to 49, before it spread to those over age 65. This pattern is repeating, she says.

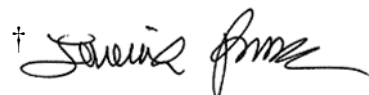
Gov. Wolf also reiterated that businesses should conduct their operations through teleworking, as much as possible. We in the conference office take this very seriously. As you know, our conference employees, except for a very few, are working from home. Our staff faithfully continue to do their work effectively from home.

The conference office will continue this for the foreseeable future. The safety of our staff is one of our highest priorities. As always, you are welcome to call the conference office or email the staff. However, the office will continue to be closed and we will not admit others into the building.

This week, a new issue of *The Link* was published, and it contained information about reopening in-person worship during the Green Phase. This letter, however, supersedes that information.

We are in this together. Let us not lose heart as we continue to pray for each other and the world. Your faithfulness in serving God and loving people is so encouraging and inspiring to all of us as we keep hope alive for such a time as this. Let us be assured that in this time of unprecedented challenge, our God never leaves us on our own. “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.” Best of all, God is with us!

In Ministry With You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah J. Park". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Jeremiah J. Park