



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

303 Mulberry Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17050-3198  
Phone (717) 766-7871 • Fax (717) 766-3210 • Email: bishoppark@susumc.org

Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

**Christy Mackey**  
Executive Admin. Asst.  
cmackey@susumc.org

**Rev. Gregory C. Myers**  
Clergy Assistant  
gmyers@susumc.org

**Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver**  
Clergy Assistant  
tsalsgiver@susumc.org

**Sarah Filizzi**  
Admin. Assistant  
sfilizzi@susumc.org

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*“We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.  
In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.  
May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”  
(Psalm 33:20-22)*

*“...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,  
looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”  
(Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

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

As we approach Thanksgiving, we think of the many things for which we thank and praise God. Even in these uncertain times of a pandemic, when we have suffered loss and anxiety, God still upholds us with grace and love, more than enough for us to share with others.

One reason to praise God is the announcement that a promising new vaccine for COVID-19 is showing significant success in trials. The manufacturer hopes by the end of the year to receive approval to distribute the vaccine.

This news comes at a time when new cases of this coronavirus are surging in our state and across the country at an alarming rate. As a matter of fact, the national infection rate is at its highest these days. In some counties in our conference, it is reported that the risk level is as high as 58 percent. I am hearing of increasingly more new cases among our people. In many areas of our conference the rate of infection equals or surpasses the rate in April.

We are all disappointed that this upward trend comes just before Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas. This is a time of year when we gather for celebrations with family and friends and plan joyous worship and fellowship. Often, we see new faces at our holiday services, providing us an opportunity to welcome more people into the body of Christ and a life of Christian discipleship.

However, for the health of our church members, neighbors, and loved ones, we must renew our vigilance to safety practices. Safety and wellness must be our number-one priority.

Therefore, I ask you to continue to limit indoor gatherings as much as possible to stop the spread. Observe social distancing at all times and wear face coverings when you may be in the presence of others, especially during worship. Continue to keep surfaces at your church disinfected after every use. Keep plenty of hand sanitizer available. (If you need more sanitizer, you can contact any of the locations listed here [http://www.susmb.org/files/Disaster\\_Response/resources/SUSUMC\\_DRM\\_Hand%20Sanitizer%20Locations.pdf](http://www.susmb.org/files/Disaster_Response/resources/SUSUMC_DRM_Hand%20Sanitizer%20Locations.pdf).)

As a church, we have to practice more rigorous safety protocols than the government directs for such a time as this. As we watch the infection rate break records almost daily—which may grow worse as the flu season continues—we must keep indoor gatherings to a maximum of 25 people, if at all possible. And we must be prepared to face the possibility that even stronger, short-term measures may be needed, if the virus continues to spread among our friends and families.

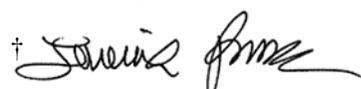
The past nine months have dragged along. However, this has not been the longest experience of a persistent pandemic. The flu outbreak of 1918 lasted for about two years. We as a nation have endured this before, and, with God's grace, we will prevail again.

The last mile of a race is the toughest. The Bible teaches that God will help us to persevere. The Christmas story provides an example of patient waiting that led to fulfillment. Simeon had grown old watching for the Messiah to arrive. Before he died, though, he was able to hold Jesus in his own arms. His prayer at that moment continues to resound: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29)

We, too, will bear witness to God's generosity and salvation this Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas season. This may happen in some unfamiliar ways. Yet, does not God often surprise us, and appear in very unexpected ways?

May God hold you, your churches, and your neighbors in wholeness and peace. And may you be to all you encounter a beacon of God's light, which pierced the darkness forever.

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 at the beginning.

Jeremiah J. Park