

# "A word of deep gratitude."

## Reflections as the "Stay Home Order" is lifted Message from Bishop Bard

June 2 2020

Dear Michigan United Methodists,

Allow me to begin with a word of deep gratitude for you all. You have continued to be the church, to share the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ in word and deed, in a hurting and chaotic world, a world where we are experiencing flooding, a world where murderous racism was caught on camera for all to see, a world where a justifiable protest against racism was engaged in, and then taken advantage of by some bent more on destruction than the creation of justice, a world wracked by the coronavirus pandemic. I've written about the killing of George Floyd in my blog released Monday. Here I want to again address the coronavirus pandemic and the changing circumstances in our state.

On Monday, June 1, 2020, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued a new **executive order** lifting her "Stay Home/Stay Safe" order immediately. In light of this action, I am no longer asking people to refrain from in-person gatherings. I want to thank each and every pastor and congregation for taking this virus seriously and strictly limiting in-person gatherings in your church buildings since mid-March. I know this has been difficult. Thank you for the creative ways you have continued to be the church during this time. Our buildings were closed, but our churches have never closed.

I also want to be clear once again that re-opening our church buildings is not a

matter of simply opening our doors as if there were no coronavirus. The actions we have taken in staying home during this time have contributed to public health. We want to continue to do our part, so the virus does not gain a new foothold in our communities. Again, I want to draw your attention to the Michigan Conference document on re-opening our facilities for guidance. The governor's executive order continues to require social distancing, the wearing of face coverings at indoor gatherings, and limits such gatherings to ten or fewer people. It continues to ask that all work that can be done remotely be done remotely. While churches remain exempt from penalties, as in previous executive orders, these ideas fit well with Phase I in our guidelines.

Use the guidelines we have provided in making good decisions for your congregations. Consult local and state public health authorities for information and further guidance. Remember that there are in our congregations those at higher risk who should not rush back into in-person gatherings. Continue to provide on-line opportunities for these persons and for the many others who have found new ways to connect with your churches. Pay attention to public health, the common good, and the well-being of others in the decisions you make. To do so is another way to witness to our faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

Finally, because of the uncertainty that continues to surround the trajectory of this virus and the pace at which larger gatherings of people might be recommended by public health officials, your district superintendents and I have decided that fall church conferences will this year, and this year only, be called as charge conferences. This limits the number of people who need to be present to conduct the necessary business of the church, and the agenda for fall charge conferences this year will be limited to the essential business that needs to be conducted. I trust you will understand the need for this decision and will support your district superintendent in her or his work.

Again, thank you for your patience. Thank you for witnessing to your faith in Jesus Christ in countless ways, including in caring for public health, the common good and the well-being of others.

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

Grace and Peace,

David A Bard



David Alan Bard

Michigan Area Bishop