

Southern Ohio / Kentucky Recommendation re. Indoor Worship

November 2020

We are eight months into the coronavirus pandemic. Covid-19 is an increasing – not a decreasing – threat. In recent weeks we have seen a drastic increase in positive Covid-19 test results, hospital admissions and deaths. While we are experiencing fatigue in keeping safety protocols, we need to continue wearing masks, staying six feet apart, washing our hands and obeying health recommendation of the Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control.

Meeting “online” for worship and church meetings continues to be the best practice for caring for each other’s health. There are gaps in our knowledge of Covid-19, such as the long-term effects the virus has on physical and cognitive health, how much co-infection with influenza might increase the death rate, and the air circulation filtration systems needed to limit the spread of the virus in the confined spaces of our buildings. We know that being indoors substantially elevates the risk of transmission.

We will not celebrate Christmas as we usually do. This Advent and Christmas will help us understand Mary and Joseph’s experience of Jesus’ birth away from family and friends and away from the comforts of routines and traditions. We can ponder the season without the distractions of a hectic holiday season.

As your congregation plans for winter, please remember the faces of the members of your congregation, including newcomers you’ve connected with virtually. We have the ability and responsibility to prevent needless deaths on the road toward normality. If the Ohio Department of Health rates your county at Level Three or Four, the District Board urges you not to hold or to discontinue in-person worship or other activities.

Decide about reopening in the light of scriptures we’ve been highlighting: “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4, NASB). “Love is patient ... It does not insist on its own way ... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (I Cor 4-7, NRSV).

We encourage you to consult statements made by the Church of the Brethren ([click here](#)), National Council of Churches ([click here](#)), the Center for Disease Control ([click here](#)) and the Ohio Department of Health ([click here](#)). The District Board strongly urges each congregation to have a plan in place for what you do if someone intentionally or unintentionally fails to follow “the rules.”

We offer this recommendation through the Advent and Christmas seasons and will update it in January 2021, or as changing circumstances or new information calls for.

Unto God's gracious mercy and protection, we commit you; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, be upon you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**

David Shetler
Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Executive Minister
Chairperson

Todd Reish,
District Board

(We express our thanks to Mid-Atlantic District for their letter, which we have relied on and to Kathryn Jacobsen, PhD, MPH, a member of the Oakton congregation and Professor of Epidemiology and Global Health at George Mason University for generously sharing her expertise and suggestions we have relied on)