



Dear Members and Friends of the West Virginia Conference,

I hope and pray that each of you are well. I highly encourage each of you and your congregations to pay attention to and put into place the recommendations of the [Centers for Disease Control](#). Additionally, I ask that you follow the directions of our local, state, and national officials. All of these agencies and persons are teaming up to create the safest environment for all people living in the United States and for our health care system.

I am requesting that all West Virginia United Methodist congregations follow the increased CDC and nationally announced restrictions for gathering until such time as they are lifted or changed. There are indications that these restrictions may become even more stringent in the days to come, so please stay informed.

On Monday, President Trump announced these restrictions: *"All Americans, including the young and healthy, should avoid gathering in groups of more than 10 people, avoid all non-essential travel and avoid eating in bars, restaurants, and public food courts."*

We need to remember that we can unknowingly be carriers of the Coronavirus and we do not want to carry the virus to someone who does not have the health and strength to fight it. So please, remember we do not isolate or refrain from meeting together for ourselves, but for others who need us to help them stay healthy and for our first responders and medical professionals.

I realize this now makes it impossible for most, if not all, of our congregations to gather in person for the next several weeks. You should refrain from meeting face to face for worship or other activities unless you can follow all the guidelines from the CDC and the additional directions coming from other local, state, and national officials who are, in some cases, further limiting the number of people who can gather for in-person meetings or events.

You can and should have worship and do ministry, but you need to plan for and facilitate worship and other activities in different ways. It is hard to know how long this will continue but we must prioritize health and safety until this public health emergency passes.

- Please make efforts to develop on-line worship options, this may include using Zoom or Google Meet or conference calls.
- Do widely advertise your plans to your congregation and community.
- Please continue to contribute your tithes, gifts, and offerings to the church so that ministries stay strong and regular bills and salaries can be paid.
- Please explore new and safe ways to connect with each other. Both those who are ministering and those who will be recipients of our ministries and services need ways to feel part of Christian community.

I continue to pray for all our pastors, lay leaders, congregations, communities, our medical personal, and health officials during this challenging and fast-

moving situation. Please, please keep up with the latest updates and make adjustments to your congregational and personal life as called for by our health officials and our national, state, and local leaders.

And remember – we need to give Hope! We are the people of Jesus Christ – the Great Physician! The people in our Churches and in our Communities need to be reminded that nothing separates us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord!

Jesus is walking with us as we walk with God and one another. This current chaos is not the end of the story. We will come through this and we can come out stronger if we take this opportunity to reach out to each other and our communities in new and more intentional ways.

Prayerfully,
Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball
