

A Message of Hope from Bishop Sandra for the people of the West Virginia Conference.

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By Sandra Steiner Ball

Dear Pastors, Lay Leaders, and Congregations of The West Virginia Conference,

I continuously give thanks and praise for your ministry, mission, and leadership in bringing people to Christ, making disciples, and sustaining the hope of Christ in these unusual and challenging times! I know that many of us are becoming COVID weary. We long to gather as congregations and in ministry and use our buildings as we have done in the past. However, it is still not safe to be shoulder to shoulder inside or outside our buildings.

Some of our congregations, in conversations between the pastor and the re-launch team, have now delayed the use of their buildings for worship gatherings until October or November, desiring to keep members of their congregations and communities as safe as possible until the positive numbers of COVID infections decline in a sustained way.

I applaud your efforts to keep all God's children safe and healthy! I applaud the on-line services, the outdoor services, the drive-in services, the use of FM transmitters, the phone services, the printing and sharing of written weekly messages, and the drive-by services as ways of gathering for worship instead of using your buildings as the worship space. These innovations will continue to help us better reach our neighbors, new people, thereby growing the number of persons who hear the Good News of Jesus Christ well into the future.

Some of our congregations – as pastors and re-launch teams have worked together making plans to adhere to the Conference, state, county public health departments, and local guidelines in using church buildings for worship – have begun worshipping in their church buildings with temperature checks upon entering, required mask usage, at least 6 feet of social distancing, and consistent, intentional sanitizing practices – resuming the use of sanctuaries or fellowship halls for weekly worship with new policies and procedures in place.

Thank you for the serious attention you have given to keeping friends and neighbors, God's people, safe and healthy. Please do not grow weary or lax in following the guidelines! I am also thankful for those who, as part of their re-launch plan, stand ready to close the use of their buildings again for two or three weeks should positive cases rise in the immediate area or in the case that someone who attended a service in the building becomes positive for the virus.

The conditions of the spread of the COVID virus differ around the Conference area. Please stay alert to what is happening in your area and be prepared to respond appropriately so that we can be a part of the movement to bring life and health to all God's people.

An update to our Conference guidelines is coming soon. Among other things, this update will address questions we are receiving about ministries that often use our church buildings such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Scouting groups, Celebrate Recovery, students needing internet access to complete schoolwork, various support groups, and others. Thank you for the innovation and care that has already taken place to support these on-going ministries for which there is a great need!

Hang in there! The best of all is that God is with us! Please do not allow anyone or anything to steal your joy in these uncertain and challenging times – for Christ calls us to be the hope bringers and the light givers and we cannot do this effectively or genuinely without the joy of Christ in our hearts!

It is with a grateful heart that I share in ministry with each of you!

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball