

New Guidelines re: Covid-19 and local church worship services

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By Sandra Steiner Ball

Dear West Virginia Conference,

Thank you for your continued mission and ministry during this time of pandemic. I appreciate your flexibility and creativity as you continue worship and a whole host of other church activities in a variety of new ways.

This week, Governor Justice mandated the use of masks in all public and private buildings. Our guidelines for relaunching the use of our church buildings already make clear that the use of masks, sanitation practices, and social distancing is part of what is expected in using our buildings for worship, mission, and ministry.

Governor Justice's mandate, which should already be in place for our congregations, is directly related to the rise in COVID transmission and infection across the state.

Because the infection rates are on the rise and growing, I strongly encourage and recommend that our congregations continue or go back to doing worship and other gatherings virtually, by conference call, drive in with outdoor speakers or with radio transmitters, or simply bundle up and continue to meet outside with masks and keeping socially distanced, until such time as the infection rate drops significantly over a period of time.

I encourage you to take this action now so that congregational gatherings do not contribute to the rise in infections and deaths in our state. We do not wish to lose one person to this pandemic and so we need to do whatever it takes to keep our families and communities as safe as possible.

Thank you for adhering to our guidelines and the Governor's mandate. If we work together, we can make a positive difference and be a part of moving our communities and ultimately our economy in healthier and stronger directions.

I know you are weary; however, we cannot let up on those things that keep us and others safe and healthy. Remember our three simple rules: Do Good; Do no Harm; Stay in love with God.

We put these rules in action when we do the following things. Wear a mask. Wash your hands often. Stay socially distanced. Use a variety of means to continue to stay connected with your congregations and communities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, making and growing disciples.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball