



MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Provincial Elders' Conference

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Memo 2020.11.13

To: Pastors, Fellowship Coordinators, and Church Boards

Re: Revised Guidelines about Church Gatherings, Meetings, and Offices

November 10, the NC Governor issued [Executive Order #176](#), which takes effect at 5:00 p.m. today (Nov. 13). The order changes the size of “mass gatherings” which are prohibited. Indoor gatherings may be of no more than 10 people, and outdoor gatherings of no more than 50.

REVISED GUIDELINES: EFFECTIVE NOV. 16 TO AT LEAST DEC. 4, 2020.

The PEC strongly recommends that:

- Church staff work from home as much as possible. Other than paid staff or volunteer staff with specific essential responsibilities, members should not be inside church facilities.
- Church offices not be open to visitors, apart from those engaged in essential activities (such as needed vendor visits, maintenance and repairs).
- Indoor worship services, or gatherings of leaders to facilitate on-line worship alternatives or other program offerings, are limited to no more than 10 people.
- Outdoor worship services, or other outdoor gatherings are limited to no more than 50 people, and held only after necessary planning, preparation and communication to ensure everyone’s health and safety.
- Congregational or choir singing, and large-group bands remain discontinued until further notice. (See note, below).¹
- In person gatherings for youth and children’s activities, whether indoor or outdoor are suspended.
- Church meetings (boards, committees, Bible studies, fellowship) should as much as possible continue to use technology to meet remotely. If there is a decision to have in person meetings, these should involve no more than 10 people.
- People at high risk (age 65 years or older, and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) stay home and travel only for absolutely essential purposes.
- When leaving home, remember the Three Ws:
 - Wear a cloth face covering.
 - Wait six feet apart. Avoid close contact.
 - Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer.

¹ Singing or playing instruments outdoors may not be as risky as indoors, but the virus particles are tiny, linger in the air, and can travel for long distances even on a very light breeze. Bands should be limited to no more than 4 to 5 players, facing the same direction, 6 to 8 feet apart from one another; if outdoors, make sure no one is downwind from the band. Lower-risk musical activities could include hand bells (a small group, masked, physically distanced, gloved, and not sharing bells; Orff instruments; a solo singer (distanced from any accompanist); stringed instruments (players masked). In place of congregational hymns, have a soloist sing, or the organist play the hymn while someone reads the words aloud.

BACKGROUND

The coronavirus remains a dangerous health threat in our nation, and at the state and local levels in which Southern Province congregations and members are located. Daily case counts, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to increase, in many places at record or alarming rates. The nature of the virus, the manner in which it is transmitted, and the public health precautions and efforts needed to slow or contain it have not changed.

The PEC has not specifically collected information about the impact of COVID-19 among our congregations. However, we are aware of several pastors, church leaders or their family members being diagnosed and needing to be in isolation, or being exposed to the virus and quarantined. In some cases, congregations have had to suspend meetings and activities due to the presence of COVID-19 among leaders and members.

From the early days of the pandemic, the PEC has based our recommendations upon information provided by the White House, by the Centers for Disease Control, by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and by the Governor of North Carolina. We have also periodically checked information from public health officials in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, where there are Moravians.

In our September 17 memo, we emphasized a portion of the NC Governor's [Executive Order # 163](#) that identifies the following higher risk factors for COVID-19 infection:

- Settings that are indoors, where air does not circulate freely, and where people are less likely to maintain social distancing by staying six (6) feet apart.
- Settings where people are in close physical contact for extended periods of time (more than 15 minutes).
- Gatherings of large groups of people because these gatherings offer more opportunity for person-to-person contact with someone infected with COVID-19.

COMMENTS and REFLECTION

Many have read or heard “we are all tired of the coronavirus, but it doesn’t look like it is tired of us.” The disruption and discouragement and even despair continue to challenge everyone, test our patience, and invite us to prayer.

A section of the Ground of the Unity may have significance for us in these days:

Our Lord Jesus entered into this world's misery to bear it and to overcome it. We seek to follow Him in serving His brothers and sisters. Like the love of Jesus, this service knows no bounds. Therefore we pray the Lord ever anew to point out to us the way to reach our neighbors, opening our hearts and hands to them in their need. (GOU, #9. Serving Our Neighbor)

Christ is indeed present in the midst of the world’s misery during this pandemic, and at work in all activities to overcome it. Our call is to follow him by serving others. Mirroring the love of Jesus, this service of ours knows no bounds, including continuing to make sacrifices – personally and together -- for the benefit and well-being of others. We are to pray the Lord to show us the ways to open our hearts and hands to reach our neighbors in their need.

Key actors: Our Lord Jesus. We (us). Christ’s brothers and sisters, our neighbors.

Key actions, on our part: Seek. Follow. Serve. Pray. Reach. Open hearts and hands.