

Memo March 12, 2020

From: Provincial Elders' Conference

**Re: Worship in the Southern Province, March 15-29
Continuing Response to COVID-19**

**The PEC strongly encourages suspending worship services
and large gatherings Mar. 15-29.**

We all continue to watch and to pray for those around the world who are being impacted by the spread of COVID-19. We pray for those infected, the families of those who have lost their lives, those providing care and relief, and those making important decisions.

This afternoon NC Governor, Roy Cooper, advised against gatherings of more than 100 people in North Carolina, including conferences, assemblies, sporting events, concerts and worship service.

The PEC, meeting today, made the decision to strongly encourage all congregations, fellowships and emerging ministries in our Province (NC, VA, SC, GA, FL) to suspend worship services and other large gatherings beginning this Sunday, March 15, through March 29.

This is not a requirement, but an encouragement made out an abundance of caution, with the health and well-being of our members and the wider community in mind.

We also determined that, should federal, state or local authorities make stronger recommendations or stricter requirements, we will follow them as part of our being good neighbors and citizens.

The remainder of this memo provides further information we trust will be helpful to church leaders in decision-making and continued response.

PREVENTING ILLNESS

The [Steps to Prevent Illness](#) suggested by the Centers for Disease Control are still important:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
- If you are sick, wear a facemask when you are around other people.
- If you are not sick, you do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick (and unable to wear a facemask).
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.

From the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services:

- People who may be at higher risk are advised to stay at home to the extent possible to decrease the chance of infection This includes anyone:
 - Over 65 years of age, or
 - With underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes, or
 - With weakened immune systems.

ALTERNATIVES TO GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

We expect to share more detailed information about alternatives early next week.

Several Moravian congregations already livestream their Sunday morning worship services online. Visit their websites to learn more about whether they plan to continue:

- [Calvary Moravian Church](#)
- [Home Moravian Church](#)
- [Friedberg Moravian Church](#)
- [New Philadelphia Moravian Church](#) (via their Facebook page)
- [Trinity Moravian Church](#)

Some churches may consider offering their own Facebook Live worship services. [This resource](#) provides some helpful hints for your technologically-savvy volunteers.

PRECAUTIONS IF YOU DO DECIDE TO GATHER

PEC is strongly encouraging that worship and other large gatherings are not held March 15-29. If your local church board should decide otherwise, here are some suggestions of precautions that have been gathered from a variety of sources:

- Clean and disinfect all “high touch” surfaces in your bathrooms, kitchens, classrooms and worship space before worship, and between worship services.
- Incorporate social distancing into your worship experience. Spread out throughout the sanctuary or another large space, and maintain a 3-foot distance from one another. Dismiss worship in sections. Encourage attendees to visit with each other outdoors.
- Avoid handshaking during rituals of friendship, and consider alternate ways to greet one another in worship, such as waves, nods, heart pats and smiles.
- Avoid passing the collection plate from person to person. Instead, allow attendees to drop their tithes and gifts in a central location or encourage mail or online giving instead. The PEC is working on options for online giving for congregations which may not already have this option.
- Anyone handling the envelopes or money should wear gloves, as bills and clothing hold the coronavirus for several hours.
- Take special care when serving or taking communion. This includes providing hand sanitizer to worship participants and discontinuing communion by intinction.
- Make hand sanitizer available for attendees. Stay well-stocked with soap and paper towels.

- Use safe food handling practices during fellowship time.
- Encourage those who are sick, especially with cough or cold symptoms, to stay home. At the same time, be sure to check on those who are sick or unable to get out.

Our *Intercessions in a Time of Crisis* provide the following prayers:

God of mercy, God of comfort, we come before you in this time of difficulty, mindful of human frailty and need, confused and struggling to find meaning in the face of suffering.

We are grateful that even as we share in the joy of Christ Jesus, we can also share abundantly in comfort in the midst of suffering.

For all who are in danger, trouble or anguish.

We ask the presence and strength of your Spirit.

Be the support of all who give their strength, their skill, and their stamina in a ministry of mercy.

Open our hearts in generosity that we may be partners in their commitment to bring relief.

We pray for those who are suffering and can make no sense of tragedy.

Help them to turn to the One who embraces us in our lives – even Jesus Christ, who lived and suffered among us.

We also lift up the prayer found in today's *Moravian Daily Text*:

Savior of the world, we are grateful that you bring us close to teach, comfort, and revive us.

May we trust that you will abide in us as you send us out to share your love.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.