



*Sent on Wednesday, November 18, 2020*

*For immediate release*

***Important new pandemic guidance from Bishop Laurie and the Iowa Conference Appointive Cabinet***

In light of worsening Covid-19 positivity rates, the crisis faced by our healthcare systems, and out of an abundance of caution and love for our neighbor, Bishop Laurie Haller and the Appointive Cabinet is directing clergy and churches to cease in-person indoor worship and church activities through and including January 10, 2021.

The Appointive Cabinet met this morning to discuss current realities facing Iowa and how best to lead the Conference in the midst of these catastrophic numbers and in response to the genuine fatigue felt by so many across Iowa.

“We need to remember our neighbor during this time and John Wesley’s rule of Do No Harm,” said Bishop Laurie Haller. “This directive comes out of love for our neighbor.”

The Re-entry Team, Extended Cabinet and Communications Team will meet and discuss ways that the Iowa Conference can guide churches in resourcing technology and supporting shifts in ministry and planning from Advent, Christmas, and the Epiphany season. This will include providing ways to partner together across the Iowa Conference to provide virtual worship, small group opportunities, and resourcing local churches with pastoral care, stewardship planning and connecting with communities during this difficult time.

“One of the most comforting truths for the Christian is the ever-present reality that God is with us,” said Rev. Dr. Lanette Plambeck of the Re-entry Team. “God’s presence is one of the greatest gifts God gives God’s people. God is personally near. Even now — when we are in these pandemic times — this is our truth and where we place our hope.”

More information will be released later this week regarding this directive.

This information is being reassessed weekly.

*Sent on Friday, November 20, 2020*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we approach Christ the King Sunday, I am reflecting on how this marks the end of the Christian year. Alongside the Thanksgiving holiday, this last Sunday of the liturgical year encourages us to pause and be thankful for the blessings we have known, even in the midst of this most troubling time.

As you know, COVID-19 infections remain high in Iowa. In Governor Reynolds' daily briefing yesterday, she mentioned that over the past seven days, there have been 22,000 new COVID cases in the state, with a 17.5% average positivity rate. Reynolds warned, "While we may be cautiously optimistic, we have a whole lot of work to do to bring the numbers down to a level where we can safely manage the virus while getting life back to normal." As of this writing, six of our 99 counties are below 15% positivity, 21 counties are between 15% and 20% positivity, and 76 of our counties are over 20% positivity. This is why the White House Coronavirus Task Force, in its November 15 report to Iowa leaders, cautioned that "The spread in Iowa is exponential and unyielding," as we close in on 200,000 total confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,102 deaths in Iowa.

In light of the continuing COVID crisis in Iowa, which is maxing out our hospitals and putting at great risk our health workers as well as the elderly and the vulnerable, people of faith are called to respond. In a press release on Wednesday, I directed clergy and congregations to refrain from in-person indoor worship and church activities through and including January 10, 2021. This allows ample time for any families who are traveling for the holidays to quarantine before gathering in person in their churches. We do this to preserve life and the well being of our health care system and our frontline workers, who are being stretched to the limit.

Advent is coming, and our churches are now adjusting plans and preparing for outdoor and drive-through events so that people may still have a vital Christmas experience. Thank you for the many ways in which you are creatively adjusting to this new reality and are sharing the love of Jesus.

Many of us have dearly missed being physically present with our friends. I love singing Christmas carols and spending time with the children, talking about the birth of Jesus. However, by refraining from in-person worship at this time, we are being true to our call as people of faith to do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Our faith gives us support and encouragement but also reminds us of our responsibility to ensure that all people are safe, especially the most vulnerable among us.

Many in our state, country, and around the world are experiencing what has been called COVID fatigue. We are tired, we are weary, and we are anxious. We miss worshipping in our church buildings, and we miss being with family and friends. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please reach out to your pastor, a neighbor, or a friend. And be on the lookout yourself for ways in which you can care for others. The apostle Paul reminds us of our call and responsibility for such a time as this, "***Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.***" (Galatians 6:2) Please know that all of our district superintendents and conference staff will be available to you to help with support. We are collecting [Advent and Christmas resources on the Iowa Conference Website](#) for online worship and tech support. We will get through this together.

As we continue to track the trends of COVID-19 infections, we will watch for positivity rates to decline below 15%. Like you, we want to gather again for in person worship and activities and will continue to keep you updated.

Blessings,

Bishop Laurie and the Appointive Cabinet