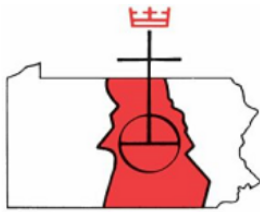


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PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Empowering the church to demonstrate and declare the courageous love of Christ!

Dear Members of PCC,

I have received messages from many of you with questions regarding the COVID-19 virus and meetings and worship life. I'd like to offer a few thoughts and gentle suggestions for your consideration. Also, there is a link below from the national setting with some further information about worship, including links to some upcoming webinars with national staff on issues related to these concerns. (I submit this to you with the understanding that you all have been keeping on top of various news stories and I do not need to reiterate CDC suggestions about hand washing, etc.)

1. **Start by engaging in your own spiritual practices** to tamp down rising feelings of anxiety. As pastor, chaplain or lay leader in your congregation, your own non-anxious presence is vital at this time. Remember that anxiety and panic are contagious. Fear is a very powerful and fast-acting emotion. Holding a position of centeredness and calm will be a blessing to your community.
2. **Currently there are just over 500 known cases of corona virus in the United States** . That means that for the majority of us, at this time, we are at low risk of contracting the virus. Please pay attention to flu and cold symptoms. However, if you have not been in contact with those who have traveled overseas recently, and you are generally healthy, your risk remains low.
3. **Ask the Consistory of your church to engage in a discussion** about what serves the best interests of the congregation at this time. You may wish to discuss the following:
 - a. **Person-to-Person contact**. The need for pastoral care during this time is high. For pastors who are healthy and have not been in contact with likely infected persons please consider continuing to provide pastoral care to those in need, particularly shut-ins. You may also ask individuals if they wish to still receive visitation and then abide by their wishes. Continuing to minister, even in times of risk, is part of our call. If, however, you are a pastor/chaplain with your own health issues, you must weigh the cost/benefits of contact with others.\
 - b. **Passing the Peace** . Some of you have already started changing your practice in this area. Making meaningful eye contact while passing the peace or bowing to one another are practices that are easy to implement and still

foster a feeling of connectedness . One congregation learn American Sign Language for "Passing the Peace" this past Sunday... be creative.

c. **Communion Practices** . What to do about communion will depend on what your congregation practices. For those who serve communion via trays in the pews, the decision may be different from those who serve by intinction with wine. Again, balance the costs and benefits with as much objectivity as possible. If your church decides not to have communion, consider putting a time limit on it for now, such as "We will not celebrate communion again until Maundy Thursday services." This helps to ease anxiety because it provides clear parameters. (Obviously, the situation will then be re-evaluated by Holy Week.)

d. **Whether to hold worship services** . There is no mandate on canceling worship services in our area at this time. This decision is one made by the local church alone. If you already live-stream your services, this may be an option for you. Please weigh your decision carefully in terms of what may be gained (greater sense of security) and what may be lost (important human connection). Gathering for worship is a tremendous balm during times of anxiety, especially engaging in corporate prayer. Steps can be put in place to lessen person-to-person contact if that is of grave concern to a majority of people in the church.

4. For the time being, your Conference staff will continue to travel within the Conference for meetings, preaching engagements, and events, unless they are cancelled. The National Staff of the UCC are evaluating their meeting plans for the spring because of the wide range of places from which people travel to and from Cleveland. There may be a ban on staff travel from Cleveland. More than likely, neither I nor Nora will be traveling for national church meetings. Your PCC staff will remain in conversation about this as the days pass and will keep you updated if we have changes.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call
Transitional Conference Minister
Penn Central Conference

[Click here for more from the national setting of the UCC .](#)