



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

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*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you
pass the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the
fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:1-3)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World.

The current Coronavirus situation is very grave. It is indeed a pandemic throughout the world and we do not know when it will abate. It will get worse in our country for some time before it turns around.

Our thoughts and prayers are with those who are infected and under medical treatment and those who are offering medical care. It breaks our hearts that there are those who do not have access to proper medical resources. We will continue to pray for God's grace and mercy to surround our communities and the world with healing and hope.

The President just declared a national emergency. Accordingly, state and local governments will take actions that can be drastic in measure and disruptive to life as usual. Things will continue to change day to day and even hour to hour.

Under the circumstances, we need to take preventive measures with all seriousness and follow correct and up to date information and instructions. As far as preventive protocols are concerned in this situation, more is better than less. Please check the websites at the end of this letter to be well informed.

Please be assured that the Cabinet and I will continue to closely monitor the evolving situation. We will communicate any additional guidance as new information and guidance comes forth related to other steps and actions that may be needed as they emerge. We are in very intentional, ongoing discernment.

News was just released this afternoon that the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops requested that the 2020 General Conference be postponed. It is too early to know what this will mean for our Annual Conference and the Jurisdictional Conference scheduled to be held at the end of May and in the middle of July respectively. I want you to know that our Sessions Committee along with the Agenda Committee will be working on ensuring that our Annual Conference will care for the business we must conduct before July 1.

Our Governor, Tom Wolf, has asked all religious communities to exercise discretion and to hold only essential activities. We understand that regular worship is an essential activity as a faith community. However, worship can take place in different shapes and forms by diverse means without gathering in person in one place. In a time like this, I strongly recommend our pastors and congregational leaders to be gracious, flexible and creative in offering worship opportunities for our congregants and people in our communities.

We also urge our churches to cancel all non-essential ministry activities, particularly those that engage with the most vulnerable populations: children, youth, adults over 60, and those with compromised immune systems. These could include ministry such as children's programming, youth fellowship, and activities specifically involving elderly people.

One of the most critical strategies to deal with the current crisis is to make the infection curve mild so that the needed people can receive proper treatments and care. Our church must be a partner in this. Let's continue to closely monitor the situation and take action with the safety of our people as top priority in mind.

At the same time, as the body of Christ, we are called to represent the loving and caring presence of Christ to people in our community and the world. I would like to share the statement by the Wisconsin Council of Churches, which came to me from the Pennsylvania Council of Churches:

"Churches around the world are learning how to be imaginative in their ministry in order to be present to those in need in a time of social disruption. From the experiences of communities facing crises around the world, we know that faith leaders can play a transformational role in calming fear, disseminating accurate information, and modifying religious practices to help keep people safe while providing spiritual care and honoring important community traditions.

We see our role as churches, leaders, and compassionate Christians as:

- combating fear with knowledge in order to encourage preparedness and decrease stigma
- maintaining operational continuity and continuing expressions of Christian life in the case of quarantine and disruption
- showing God's compassion and care to those in our communities who are affected."

God is with us. We will continue to be the church in witness of God's presence with us. Let's intensify our prayer for the church and the hurting world as we put our hope and trust in God who cares and heals.

In Christ,



Jeremiah J. Park

Pennsylvania Department of Health:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>