



March 12, 2020

To: Churches, Church Pastors, and Clerks of Session:

Today Gov. Evers declared a public health emergency for Wisconsin related to the coronavirus. The State Department of Health Services is recommending that all events with more than 250 people be cancelled. The Presbytery of Milwaukee is strongly urging our congregations to follow this recommendation. Further, because many of our members are in at-risk categories, we suggest that our sessions consider cancelling all worship services even if the threshold of 250 people is not met. Ultimately, this is a matter for discernment and decision by each session.

While our congregations might not have any known or suspected cases of coronavirus in their midst, we are mindful of the risk that exposed, but symptom-free people unwittingly pose to others. A careful response to this pandemic means that we all must take steps to slow the progress of this virus to avoid passing it to those most at risk and to reduce the pressure on an increasingly stressed emergency health care system. We anticipate that at least through the end of March this recommendation will remain in place, but we will track the guidance of public health professionals and public schools. Sessions might choose to make their decisions on a weekly basis as the situation develops.

We do not make this recommendation lightly because we know how deeply our faith is expressed and felt when we come together in worship. Particularly when this pandemic is causing anxiety and fear, it is our faith that carries us through. We will be looking at opportunities for people to have access to Presbyterian worship services online. In the meanwhile, be assured that our careful and measured response to the pandemic is not driven by fear, but on science for how we can best protect and show our love for one another. Our worship will not stop because of the virus, but it should take a different form for a while.

The Presbytery has shared other [safe practices](#) for worshipping communities, and we will continue to update these resources. Please reach out to Stated Clerk Christian Boyd (statedclerk@pbymilwaukee.org), Presbytery Executive Rachel Yates (ryates@pbymilwaukee.org), or Moderator Judy Jaggard (judy.jaggard@gmail.com) with any questions, suggestions, or concerns.



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