

Denominational Leaders Unite:
Congregations should refrain from in-person gatherings
April 28, 2020

As denominational leaders in the Christian tradition, we are united in our concern regarding Governor Kim Reynolds' declaration to allow spiritual and religious gatherings in Iowa.

It was with surprise we learned of the Governor's proclamation and, as such, we feel compelled to provide clarity and guidance of what it means for congregations to be faithful and safe during these extraordinary times.

In the spirit of ecumenism, we join together in asking congregations and members across the state to take faithful action by refraining from in-person religious gatherings, including worship. We encourage and hope that congregations will worship and gather in community from afar continuing the use of technology and other means. Decisions to return to in-person gatherings in our congregations should be based on science, the best practices recommended by public health officials, and in consultation with the leaders of our faith communities.

It is by our faith that we are compelled to love our neighbor. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, that love comes to expression by remaining physically apart. Loving our neighbor, and thereby the whole community, includes putting public health and the well being of others ahead of the natural desire to be physically present together in community and in worship.

As faith leaders, our hearts grieve for the immense pain and suffering felt by so many during these times. Whether mourning the loss of a loved one who has died from the coronavirus; facing the economic stress due to the loss of employment, business, or income; feeling isolated or alone; experiencing the stress of managing children and work from home; carrying the burden of uncertainty from the disaster and when a new normal may emerge, we pray you might find strength and hope in God's unending and ever-present love.

For the sake of the common good, we ask all congregations, their leaders, and their members to prioritize the safety and well being of each other, those at particular risk, and those in their broader community. Please love one another and your neighbor by continuing to be in community together from afar.

Rev. Ian McMullen, General Presbyter, Presbytery of North Central Iowa
Bishop Laurie Haller, Iowa Conference of The United Methodist Church
Rev. Brigit Stevens, Executive Conference Minister; Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota UCC Conferences
The Right Reverend Alan Scarfe, Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Iowa
Bishop Thomas R. Zinkula, Catholic Diocese of Davenport

Bishop Michael L. Burk, Southeastern Iowa Synod - ELCA
Rev. Lorna H. Halaas, Bishop, Western Iowa Synod, ELCA
Bishop Steven L. Ullestad, Northeastern Iowa Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. John M. Richardson, Interim Regional Minister, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Upper Midwest
Rev. Jacqueline L. Saxon, Executive Minister of Mid-American Baptist Churches of Iowa and Minnesota
Tim Button-Harrison, Northern Plains District Executive, Church of the Brethren
Rev. David Feltman, Ecumenical Connections of Iowa Coordinator
Rev. Kristin Pike, Presbyterian Church (USA), Stated Clerk of the Presbyteries of Des Moines & North Central Iowa
Pat Shipley, Stated Clerk, Presbytery Missouri River Valley
Rev. Richard Francis, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Prospect Hill, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Elder Amgad Beblawi, Interim Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Des Moines
Rebecca Blair, Ph.D., Stated Clerk, Presbytery of East Iowa
Rev. Chaz Ruark, Executive Presbyter, John Knox Presbytery
Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister, Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister for Christian Formation, Central Plains Mennonite Conference