



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

North Texas Annual Conference
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To United Methodists of the North Texas Conference:

The ongoing crisis of the COVID-19 virus has brought pleas from public health officials to our community. In a recent meeting, faith leaders were asked to warn our congregations of a possible spike in the number of cases in the coming days. They have discovered that the increase in cases we are seeing comes from social gatherings where people feel safer and do not heed the healthcare community's warnings to wear masks and practice social distancing, especially during family gatherings and large social events.

Currently, more positive COVID-19 cases are being reported than at any time since the pandemic first began. This is true nationally, in Texas, and in all counties across North Texas – regardless of size. We do, however, have the ability to contain the spread of this virus by wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining proper social distancing. I ask that you please heed the advice of and defer to the recommendations of public officials and health practitioners who are the most knowledgeable about this virus so that our communities can return to a place of good health.

For the time being, we will continue to have churches open for in-person worship, provided that all attendees **strictly follow** proper protocols. A vital part of this is wearing masks during all phases of your church's worship service – from before you walk into the building and including your time in the pews. There are pastors who, knowing the context of caseloads in the church's community, may choose to suspend public worship for a season – and I would support your pastor in making such a decision. Please know, however, there may come a time when all in-person worship will be suspended.

As people of faith, we place a considerably high value on how we live together in community. This is a critical tenet of who we are as United Methodists. We must realize how our actions can affect our church community and the broader communities in which we live. We must act in ways that show our love for one another and lift each other up; specifically, we must not do anything that could conceivably harm others (intentionally or otherwise.) **We will wear masks. We will practice social distancing. We will do no harm.**

For more than eight months, we have been challenged in ways that many of us could never have imagined. Thank you for your perseverance and faithful witness, which has made us a stronger Church.

May you have a blessed Thanksgiving.

Peace,

Michael McKee

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