

Indiana Disciples encouraged to consider cancelling worship this week



My friends,

Many in our church have contacted me seeking my counsel on how their congregation should respond to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and the recommendation that we should avoid large group gatherings. I met this morning with my counterparts in other faith traditions in Indiana and as a result of that conversation I want to

recommend that our churches consider not holding their regular worship service this Sunday, and possibly future Sundays depending on the counsel of our state health department.

The cancellation of worship does not necessarily mean that all events in the congregation's life should also be suspended. Food pantries that serve the poor may need to continue to provide support to our neighbors. Different decisions may need to be made regarding pre-schools and daycares hosted in our buildings, and other events that bring together smaller groups of persons. But our worship life may unknowingly put some or all of us at increased risk.

In making this recommendation I am persuaded by the words of former Indiana Disciples minister **David Shirey**, who now serves as Senior Minister of Central Christian Church, Lexington, KY who writes regarding his congregation's decision to temporarily suspend their services:

Our rationale for these decisions derives from principles grounded in our faith mandate to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. Simply stated, "In this circumstance, what does love require?"

1. Love requires us to protect the vulnerable. *This virus puts the elderly and people with compromised health conditions at special risk. Like me, our congregation's senior members are motivated by a fervent desire and unwavering commitment to worship God together. I and they will make every effort, regardless of the risk or cost, to be present for worship, feeling guilty if we do not make such an effort. Cancelling corporate worship this Sunday and offering a service available for home viewing safeguards our most vulnerable and relieves the deeply ingrained impetus to worship weekly.*

2. Love calls for us to seek the common good. *By voluntarily taking a sacrificial action such as cancelling corporate worship, we love our neighbors by doing our part to take an action that we hope will slow down the spread of the virus, thereby preventing as-yet-healthy persons from contracting the virus or making it easier for infected persons who may not yet know of the infection to spread it unknowingly to others.*

3. Love calls for us to act in solidarity with persons of good will. *Heeding the Kentucky Governor's request and heeding the best wisdom of public health officials, we join a community-, state-, nation- and worldwide coalition of concerted caring whose cooperative efforts will the well-being of all people.*

4. Love calls for actions that minimize regret. *If we were to proceed with events or activities that lead to the infection of persons or the unwitting spread of the virus, we would rue the decision to proceed with "business as usual" when we could have chosen otherwise. Though it is debatable whether faith communities cancelling their services this weekend will indeed make a difference for the good, we can proceed with this decision knowing we did not choose to disregard or ignore this call for vigilance and caution.*

Instead of gathering for worship as normal consider bringing your community together “virtually” by using Facebook Live streaming, Zoom, YouTube, or freeconferencecall.com You might also point your members to the weekly worship service that is provided by DisciplesNet, our on-line congregation. Their website is www.disciplesnet.org

If you decide to continue with worship services, encourage the most at-risk people in your congregation to stay home. That includes people over 60, people with heart, kidney, or lung disease, and those with chronic respiratory conditions. And continue to practice the safe handling of communion and in your coming together minimize contacting and touching others.

You are encouraged to monitor the information about this virus at the **Indiana State Department of Health** <https://www.in.gov/isdh/28470.htm> and the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

We pray for God’s wisdom and guidance as we express our leadership in these extraordinary times. And we pray for the health and safety of all God’s children in every nation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. Spleth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard L. Spleth
Regional Minister