

A Letter from Living Water Association and Heartland Region, UCC Ohio. 27 April, 2020

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1. Many of you have asked about re-opening church and gathering again in person. Some of you received this email from the Conference. I am making sure all and each of you receives it.

The season of the COVID 19 pandemic continues to lengthen testing our patience in many ways. There is a palpable, eager longing to gather and return to a sense of what is familiar. Especially there is a yearning to gather in person for worship. We certainly share this desire and also carry a deep concern for everyone's health and safety. Because of this, **we write to offer our strong recommendation that congregations not gather for worship at least until May 31st and possibly beyond.** We recognize that each congregation has the authority to make its own decisions in this matter but there are several concerns we feel are deeply worthy of your consideration.

First, there still remains the restriction from the Ohio Department of Health regarding large group gatherings and the importance of the continued practice of physical, social distancing. While the COVID 19 curve has been flattened, the potency of the virus remains. Those over age 65 and those with respiratory and autoimmune health issues are still at higher risk, even as we know that COVID 19 has claimed the lives of those much younger and those with no apparent prior health challenges.

Second, the re-engagement of in-person worship will require special planning and protocols that will be necessary to keep our gathered congregations safe. It will be vitally important to have these protocols well developed and well communicated in order to do our part to help prevent a resurgence that would again cause the need for sheltering at home. Now is the time to begin thinking carefully about the guidelines you will follow when the time to meet in person comes.

Toward that end, we are attaching a: <https://livingwaterone.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-in-persons-worship-.pdf> that has been developed by Rev. Jason Thompson, pastor of West Park United Church of Christ. Together with his church leaders Rev. Thompson has developed specific guidelines that seek to cultivate an environment of safety for all. We hope this may be helpful to you as you begin your intentional planning for your own settings of ministry.

These weeks and months have been challenging indeed. We are so thankful for your leadership and care. We know this time has required new ways of engaging ministry at practically every level. As always, we hold you in our prayers and are glad to be available as you consider the next phases of church life and the possibilities of re-gathering.

Easter blessings on you all!