

To: Pastors and Congregations of the Oklahoma Annual Conference.
From: Bishop Jimmy Nunn
Dean of the Cabinet – Rev. Tish Malloy
Assistant to the Bishop – Rev. Dr. Joe Harris
Director of Connectional Ministries – Rev. Derrek Belase
Interim Treasurer – Randy Compton
Date: March 25, 2020
Re: Memo 2— Covid-19

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We last wrote to you on March 17 and today, that feels like so long ago. Much has transpired since then, none of which any of us could have imagined then. However, with yesterday's announcement by Governor Stitt regarding "Safer at Home," we want to update some of our previous guidance. There were certain measures outlined in his executive order which are statewide:

- Issues a statewide "Safer at Home" order for adults over the age of 65 and vulnerable individuals with serious underlying medical conditions.
- Limits gatherings to no more than 10 people.
- Prohibits visitations to nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

You can read the entire executive order here –

https://www.governor.ok.gov/articles/press_releases/governor-stitt-announces-latest-covid-19-actions.

In further guidance released this morning, he expanded his list of exempted workers under the category of other community-based government operations and essential functions to include "faith-based services that are provided through streaming or other technology."

In light of all that, we strongly recommend and expect that all United Methodist Churches close and that staff work from home as much as possible. We do not recommend that any in-person gatherings take place for any reason though we do understand that some may choose to follow CDS safe distancing and under 10 people requirements in order to record worship services and messages of devotion and encouragement.

This is permissible under the CDC guidelines as well as in keeping with Governor Stitt's exemptions and his "Safer at Home" order. If you are gathering to record or host live worship on Sunday morning, please make sure you have under 10 people in your gathering and that they are practicing the 6' safe distancing guidelines. This will help us flatten the curve.

We have all been heartened to see the various creative, innovative ways you are providing a vital connection between your church and your congregants. You are doing an outstanding job seeing ALL the people! There are numerous webinars online which provide guidance and information on online giving, worship and leading Bible study and other groups during this time of impact by COVID-19.

We also want to provide a summary of what we sent earlier regarding Holy Communion. United Methodist licensed local pastors and ordained elders in the Oklahoma Annual Conference may celebrate the sacrament of holy communion through a recorded or online worship service to which people are invited to gather as a congregation from a distance. It is recommended that an order from the United Methodist Book of Worship or United Methodist Hymnal be used. The Words of Institution and Epiclesis ("Pour out Your Holy Spirit...") are essential to the service.

This unusual way of consecrating and receiving this sacrament is being allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic because congregations are being gathered electronically by necessity. The elements of bread and preferably some form of juice need to be used by the congregants wherever they are. Clergy are strongly encouraged to use the Lord's Prayer either before or after the community receives the elements. Congregations that are led by supply pastors should join with a congregation that is led by a licensed or ordained clergyperson in order to partake of the sacrament.

Questions for clarification on any of these matters should be directed to your district office.

Once again, follow CDC guidelines. Be creative and safe. Share ideas and resources. Be concerned about people - not statistics and learn from this emergency. Most especially, love and care for one another as our Lord has told us to do.