

COVID-19 a risk to worship services, Bible studies, and other church meetings.

Dear Friends in Christ,

What a difference a few days, or even a few hours makes in the midst of a crisis. Last Saturday we gathered as an Annual Conference at Albion College to take significant action for our denomination. Today, such a gathering would not be permitted as our governor has banned all gatherings of 250 or more throughout the state due to the coronavirus and COVID-19.

Just yesterday I sent a pastoral letter encouraging good hygiene and appropriate social distancing as you make decisions about worship and church events. Given the developments over the last few hours, I need to ask more of you as Michigan United Methodists.

I am asking that each United Methodist Church in Michigan refrain from in-person gatherings for the remainder of the month of March. This would include worship, bible studies, and any other meetings. We are at a critical juncture in stemming the reach of the coronavirus and as a church we can play an important role in slowing the spread of the COVID-19 disease.

I am not asking that you close the church, only asking that we find new ways together to be the church. Use electronic media to share in worship and bible study. Hold necessary meetings electronically. Care for one another with phone calls or other social media connections. Give to your church electronically or by mail. Our Conference web page will continue to provide information to you about these ways of being the church in this

unprecedented time. Look at it often.

To find good information about the spread of the virus, and about hygiene and social distancing practices please continue to go to the web page www.coronavirus.gov

This is a time like none other we have experienced. I take this disease seriously and want the church to do its part for the health and well-being of our world. I also take seriously our shared faith in Jesus Christ, this Jesus who encouraged us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, this Jesus who encouraged us to not be afraid, and to let the anxiety of the day be enough, this Jesus whose resurrection we will soon celebrate. It is my deep prayer that when Easter comes around, we will be able to gather joyously together, face-to-face, for worship. I ask that you join me in that prayer.

Grace and Peace,

David A Bard



David Alan Bard Michigan Area Bishop