



Dear Mt. Olive Church,

For the next eight weeks Mt. Olive worship will be online only.

Earlier this week, IU Health asked the Bishop to request that churches stop gathering in person, in order to assist in *slowing down* the spread of COVID-19. Over 1000 IU health staff are quarantined or ill. There are not enough backup staff. We, Mt. Olive UMC, have been fortunate so far but as cases sharply rise in Grant County it would be unwise to continue in person worship at this time. We will hear the cry of our neighbor and will show our love by making this sacrifice.

We have sought to avoid this as long as we could but I am compelled by my own conscious, prayerful reflection, and the request of the Bishop, members of this church, and the healthcare professionals of our state and community. I grieve this regrettable but necessary decision. Here are the basics that you need to know...

- **No in person indoor worship until at least January 17th**
- Online resources are being utilized to continue ministry
- Member Care is continuing through our Care Team
- Small Groups are discouraged from gathering but can make their own determination.

Below is more information to each of these points.

Online Resources

Your staff and I have developed and are expanding Mt. Olive's online presence. We will post opportunities to connect online through our Website, Newsletter and FB pages. Also be sure to check the church calendar and current events.

Member Care

Our Care Team led by Teresa Cates continues to keep us connected with our care facility residence and shut-ins. Each month the Care Team gathers to discuss the needs of our congregation. If you know a church member, neighbor, or friend who could use some care please do not hesitate to inform the church, staff and or the Care Team.

Small Groups

Small groups and Sunday schools are encouraged to go online. If you need help setting up a Zoom or Google Meet account we will assist you. Contact the church office or request assistance on our webpage at mtoliveumc.com. It is highly suggested that all in person gatherings be suspended. But this risk is up to each of you to gauge for yourselves.

IN CLOSING

2020 has been a difficult year. New advances in Covid treatment and vaccines offer promises for 2021 but we are not free of the burden and duty of caution yet.

Jesus tells us to *Love our neighbor as ourselves*. From our D.S. Lore Gibson: “There are visitation restrictions in long-term care facilities, where loneliness and depression plague the residents. Lifting restrictions puts workers at risk as well as residents. Not lifting restrictions keeps family apart at crucial times. No one will be cared for if the staff are not well enough to work. They want to see the loved ones of their residents alive when this is all over. Prioritizing has been emotionally exhausting. Our teachers and school staff are stressed from adapting every other week to new realities. There are not enough substitutes to cover staff absences.”

This is our small part church to help those risking their health for our community’s well being. Your Mt. Olive Staff will be hard at work providing quality online resources and opportunities for us all to grow in Christ.

Blessings and Be Safe,
Pastor Rob Barton
Mt. Olive Staff

ATTACHMENTS

Messages from our Bishop and D.S.Lore Gibson

BISHOP TREMBLE’S COMMUNICATION

“Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

- Galatians 6:2 (CEB)

Friends,

We are at an unprecedented time in history. In just the past few weeks, we have witnessed a rapid increase of positive COVID-19 cases across the state, nation and world setting new daily and weekly records nearly every day. This news is alarming and requires all of us to make difficult but necessary decisions for the Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church.

- *“There is a tremendous risk with this virus. It spreads really, really easily. The next 8-12 weeks are critical. Anything the Church can do to reduce gatherings will be helpful to slow the spread. We must take this very seriously,”* said Kristen Kelley, Director of Infection Prevention, IU Health

Since it is a fact that church worship gatherings are key sources of the spread of COVID-19, it is the recommendation of your Bishop that all churches should suspend in-person worship and in-person meetings of groups for the foreseeable future until the number of COVID cases improve. This will likely include making alternative plans for the holidays. This is particularly true for churches in counties and communities where hospitals are reporting excessive demands due to the rising number of COVID admissions.

We do not make this recommendation lightly, but offer it through an abundance of caution, a continued commitment to our 3 General Rules: Do no harm, Do good, and Stay in love with God; and because “loving our neighbor” is at the top of our priority list. Remember, a life saved this winter is a life saved to journey with us into the next year.

Please note that we are not closing the Church! We are not out of business! *But I am calling on all pastors to use their authority to make wise and bold decisions for their community,* and I am calling for all Indiana United Methodists to continue ministry in creative and innovative ways like you have been for the past 7 months.

- *“We need to be willing to do the hard things and to make sacrifices in the short term for the benefit of all in the long term,”* said Rev. Kevin Armstrong, Chief of Staff, IU Health

We encourage you to watch the COVID Town Hall [video](#) on the INUMC website as well as resources discussed in that webinar (Nov. 16). Over the past several months I have shared some suggested actions you can take in your local church. Additionally, here are some of those suggestions (with a few new ones):

- Follow the 3 Ws: Wash your hands; watch your distance; wear your mask.
- Isolate yourself if you believe you have been exposed to the Coronavirus. Call one of the many free screening hotlines or online sites for guidance and/or talk with your doctor to determine next steps.
- Quarantine yourself at the first signs of symptoms for 14 days since your last contact with someone who was ill (even family in your household). Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>
- Continue with socially-distanced outdoor and drive-in worship (as weather permits).

- Continue to care for the vulnerable persons in your community with appropriate precautions (food banks, meal programs, etc).
- Go online with worship, studies and small groups. Use Zoom, Facebook, and/or any of the variety of other platforms available.
- Pray.
- Focus on what you CAN do, rather than what you cannot.

Here's some good news: I believe a great revival is coming in 2021. We may be making sacrifices now, but you have never seen a reunion like the one we are going to have at the end of this pandemic. Our God is good, and God is not done with us yet. Hold on a little while longer. Stay strong. Remain faithful. And as always...

Be encouraged,

Bishop Julius C. Trimble
 Resident Bishop
 Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT LORE GIBSON

Brothers and sisters,

Earlier this week, IU Health asked the Bishop to request that churches to stop gathering in person, in order to assist in *slowing down* the spread of COVID-19. Over 1000 IU health staff are quarantined or ill. There are not enough backup staff. The healthy work extra shifts to care for us stubborn Hoosiers.

I spoke with a high school friend/relative who is Director of Nursing at Pulaski County Memorial Hospital, Linda Webb. If you are admitted to a smaller hospital and need to go elsewhere for treatment, a delay is likely. Not only are most larger hospitals full, but emergency personnel and ambulance services are understaffed and overworked. This is the same story we hear from several small facilities.

There are visitation restrictions in long-term care facilities, where loneliness and depression plague the residents. Lifting restrictions puts workers at risk as well as residents. Not lifting restrictions keeps family apart at crucial times. No one will be cared for if the staff are not well enough to work. They want to see the loved ones of their residents alive when this is all over. Prioritizing has been emotionally exhausting.

Our teachers and school staff are stressed from adapting every other week to new realities. There are not enough substitutes to cover staff absences. I am 100% certain parents and grandparents know their own special brand of fatigue from similar ups and downs.

All say the end is in sight. The virus is expected to peak in weeks. Vaccines are being fast tracked. But now? **Now, those who serve us need our help.** So please:

1. For the love of others if not for the love of God, don't gather indoors. Don't.
2. Care for those who serve us – it matters. Signs showing your support, notes of encouragement, phone calls. Add your local medical and education personnel to your prayer list.
3. Offer new opportunities to connect. Conference calls work for support groups in some places. In others, it's a daily text or phone call to check in. Drive in gatherings or outdoors at a distance work for many. It doesn't require indoor contact in groups to rake someone's yard or sing carols outside a group home. One size doesn't fit all, but there IS a size that fits you.
4. THIS IS NOT ABOUT POLITICS. It's not even, at this point, about safety. It's about **slowing things down** so those who serve us can keep going.
5. Support local businesses. This is not the year to help Amazon get richer (unless your local business has a store on Amazon). Get carry out and have date night at home, or eat lunch in the park with your long underwear on and your dog in tow. We don't have to physically touch those out of work to drop off or mail a gift card anonymously

This is not a time to shout opinions or insist on our own way. It is the time to come together, get creative, and support those who try to support us. **We are the Body of Christ. We are here for this.**

Lore