July 16, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yesterday Governor Wolf issued a new order that identified targeted restrictions to help contain the spread of the coronavirus in our state. Among them is a limit of 25 persons for indoor gatherings and a limit of 250 persons for outdoor gatherings.

I am writing to encourage you, along with your church leadership, to respect this restriction in your ministry site, especially in regard to services of worship. Our primary motivation in restricting our indoor and outdoor gatherings for worship is the care of our congregation members and our neighbors. For those of you who have already resumed indoor worship, please consider your interior space and be contentious about how many people you have gathering within that space. No more than twenty five people is the target. Can you honestly gather safely with more than that?

Might we compare this situation to a marathon, meaning that endurance and pace are more valuable to us right now than speed in achieving the final goal of being able to gather safely for worship? Unlike a marathon, though, the situation we find ourselves in does not have mile markers or a clearly established end point. There is still so much that is unknown and so many mixed messages being heard. In this situation, I would rather err on the side of caution and take the steps to provide safe environments with our places of worship for the sake of everyone who comes.

It is helpful to think of this being a time to attend to our way of life, which is always to love God and to love our neighbor as our primary response to any situation in which we find ourselves, for as long as that situation endures. Yesterday’s announcement defines our situation yet again in a new way. Our way of life, now and always, is to respond with the grace and mercy we have received from our Lord Jesus, with care for our neighbors, and with trust that God’s good and gracious will is being done in and through the challenges we face.

Thank you for your faithfulness in the ministry of the Gospel in this synod!

Shalom,

Bishop Barbara J. Collins