

**Advice Regarding COVID-19 Precautions**  
**Presbytery Council**  
**Presbytery of Lake Huron**  
February 17, 2020

To the Sessions and Congregations of our Presbytery,

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent— the season of the liturgical calendar marked by penitence, self-denial, and simplicity in spiritual preparation for Holy Week and Easter. We practice this posture of humility as modeled by Jesus and expressed many times in Scripture.

*“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” – 1 Peter 5:6-7*

Since the COVID-19 public health crisis reached pandemic status eleven months ago, it seems that we have had a year of Lent with no Easter. The common question, “What are you giving up for Lent?” has an ironic and even cruel quality as we consider all we have had to give up this past year as individuals, as a church, and as a society.

At the time of our last guidance, in November, COVID-19 cases and deaths in our state were skyrocketing. At that time, we strongly advised congregations not to conduct in-person worship – especially during the holiday season – and to consult multifactor sites like [www.covidactnow.org](http://www.covidactnow.org) for guidance regarding when it might be safe to reopen.

It has been encouraging in the last few weeks to see the number of cases and deaths dropping, especially as our most vulnerable citizens are beginning to receive effective vaccines. We are now below the rates we saw in early November when we issued our advice.

As our numbers have improved, on February 8, the State of Michigan issued new directives relaxing restrictions on some activities. And, as we near the anniversary of the COVID lockdown, and a second Easter in the pandemic, we know that many members and some sessions are eager to return to former patterns of worship and ministry.

Although we have seen significant improvement, we are far from being out of the woods. As we write this letter, of the 20 counties which lie in our presbytery:

- None register in the “low risk” (green) category
- Eight register as “medium risk” (yellow): Iosco, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Gladwin, Arenac, Gratiot, Genesee, and St. Clair
- Twelve register as “high risk” (orange)
- None register as “critical” (red)

In addition, new strains of the coronavirus that are present in our state are up to 900% more infectious and 20% more virulent than the original. This means that the viral load and exposure time to contract COVID are significantly reduced, while the risks of hospitalization and death have increased. And, while the two approved vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious effects of the virus, the rate at which it is being distributed means that most people will not receive the vaccine until late summer or early fall. Dr. Lisa Allgood, an immunology researcher and executive of Cincinnati Presbytery who

shared important guidance with our presbytery in August, has provided a recent update on COVID research, vaccines, effects, and protocols, which can be found [here](#).

The risk is still high, and we cannot advocate returning to in-person worship except in the most limited and careful circumstances. We urge you not return to in-person worship until your county has seen seven consecutive days of green (“low”) or yellow (“moderate”) risk using a multi-factor assessment such as [www.covidactnow.org](http://www.covidactnow.org). And be prepared to suspend all in person gatherings should the level rise to “high” or “critical” levels for three or more days in a week.

Color	Meaning	Guidance
Green (low)	On track to contain COVID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe to conduct in-person activities <b>with safety protocols</b></li> </ul>
Yellow (moderate)	Slow disease growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit in-person activities to <b>essential functions only</b>.</li> <li>If yellow is sustained for more than seven consecutive days, <b>consider suspending all indoor, in-person activities</b>.</li> </ul>
Orange (high)	At risk of outbreak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If orange is present for three days in any week, <b>suspend all indoor</b> in-person activities until you have had seven consecutive days of yellow or green, and <b>consider suspending all outdoor</b> in-person activities.</li> <li>If there is sustained orange for seven consecutive days, <b>suspend all in-person activities (both indoor and outdoor)</b> until you have seven consecutive days of yellow or green.</li> </ul>
Red (critical)	Active or imminent outbreak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Suspend all in-person activities (both indoor and outdoor)</b> until you have had seven consecutive days of yellow or green.</li> </ul>

If your Session does decide to return to in-person worship, please observe strictly all necessary public health precautions including screening, masking, distancing, disinfection, and tracking. And if you are in a vulnerable population or believe you might be sick or have been exposed to the virus, PLEASE STAY HOME.

Finally, as we head into this Lenten season, we would like to remind you that although we may not be able to worship in person, the church is not closed. Instead, we are discovering that Christ is present among us in new and different ways. Let us discover and celebrate the grace that is present in our grief, and the resurrection life that we can celebrate even in a pandemic Good Friday world.

*And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. – 1 Peter 5:10-11*

In Christ’s Fellowship,  
 The Presbytery Council  
 Presbytery of Lake Huron