

Dear Pastors, Deacons, SAMS and Lay Leaders of the NWSWI,

Covid 19 is not over. We are all tired of it. However, we can't let down our guard and slide back into a normal activities yet. We've all made sacrifices and are missing some of our favorite activities; especially Sunday morning worship in our church buildings. I am too. The virus is now more active in Wisconsin than ever. Now is not the time to let down our guard. Now is not the time to go back to worship inside your church building.

This morning I met with Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes and Religious leaders, and this afternoon I sat in on Gov. Tony Evers COVID 19 briefing with the DHS representative Andrea Palm, Dr. Westergard and THEDA CARE President Dr. Androva. Here's what they said:

The situation here in Wisconsin is very serious. Alarming trends. Intense virus spread, *exponential spread*...both community and on the college campuses....significant...*not just colleges*.

Yesterday, Sept 30, WI had highest number of deaths in the state since this pandemic began...27

The state of WI has 72 counties. 45 are categorized as **very high** rate of infection, the rest are in the **HIGH** rate.

Four days in a row our state has seen record numbers of NEW positive cases – more than 2000 each day, as well as record numbers of hospitalizations...some hospitals are near capacity.

At both of those meetings, Governor Evers and Lt. Governor Barnes called upon the local elected leaders, business leaders and leaders in the faith community for help!

- Keep workers and members of your congregations safe;
- Help individuals believe this is serious - they need to take individual responsibility to keep themselves, their families, neighbors and community safe. Every one of us has a role to play;
- Wear a mask any time you leave your house, keep at least 6 ft apart, wash your hands, stay out of large indoor gatherings, avoid gathering with people you don't live with, stay home except for essentials, cancel in person gatherings, and stop all large group gatherings;
- This is not politically motivated. **This is a health crisis**. I don't care what political party you affiliate with. You are a beloved child of God and I don't want you to die. At the end of the day we don't want people to die or get critically ill from COVID 19. And, you do not want your church to be the point of community spread.
- We need full public cooperation to flatten the curve, reduce the rise in the number of cases. Challenge misinformation. Hold your leaders accountable so they make safe decisions.

So here is the bottom line. Please keep your people safe. **This is my recommendation: Do not gather for worship inside your church buildings right now**. Continue online worship with Facebook live or Youtube. Use Zoom for meetings. Call on the phone. Facetime. Do what you need to do to keep your people safe. Do the right thing, even if it is the most difficult. For more information check out....

DHS.WI. Gov

WCC.org for more information

NWSWI.org

Please pray with me:

Compassionate God,

These are difficult days. There seems to be only bad news. We long for the ways things were before the coronavirus affected all our lives. We especially wish to gather together in our church buildings and to worship you in that familiar and comforting space. We wish to sing our favorite hymns of praise to you. We hunger for the bread and wine you give us in Holy Communion. Help us to be patient and wait until it is safe to gather again church for worship.

We pray for those whose loved ones have died of COVID 19, comfort them in their grief.

We pray for those who are sick with the virus, struggling at home or in the hospital, bring healing.

We pray for researchers and scientists, may they develop a safe vaccine.

We pray for the frontline health care workers, doctors, nurses, therapists, EMTs, and hospital workers, keep them safe so they can care for those who are sick.

We pray for schools, administrators, teachers, staff and students keep them safe and help them learn during these stressful days.

Help each one of us do what we can do to stop the spread of this terrible disease. Help us to make small sacrifices so that all might live.

Lord God, these are difficult days. We are weary and discouraged and fearful. We lift up to our prayers today knowing that your Holy Spirit will intercede for us even when our words fail.

Amen.

Together In Christ,

~Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson