

Dear Friends in Christ,

The key consideration Gov. Abbott stressed repeatedly when introducing his three-phase plan to slowly reopen Texas businesses is that we must protect the “vulnerable” and “at risk” members of the population. The same consideration is also found throughout his [Open Texas Report](#), which defines “vulnerable” or “at-risk” persons as “those who are 65 or older, especially those with chronic lung disease; moderate to severe asthma; chronic heart disease; severe obesity; diabetes; chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; liver disease; or a weakened immune system.” In fact, Gov. Abbott stressed that during Phase One of the plan, “vulnerable populations” should continue to stay at home as much as possible. You can access a copy of Gov. Abbott’s executive order and the Open Texas Report at [ctcumc.org/coronavirus-covid-19-updates](http://ctcumc.org/coronavirus-covid-19-updates).

It is my conviction that it is unwise to return to in-person worship at this time. I am also convinced that it is counter to our Wesleyan core value to do no harm. I strongly urge churches to “Breathe Deep” and stay the current course of online worship and ministry only. As the economy slowly reopens, it is possible, if not quite likely, that there will be a rise in confirmed COVID-19 infections. Our desire to reconnect with each other via in-person worship must not disregard our Christian responsibility to care for our community. **The vulnerable are not disposable and we must not put them at risk.** As the Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (CEB) *“Everything is permitted, but everything isn’t beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn’t build others up. No one should look out for their own advantage, but they should look out for each other.”* Now is a time for us to behave like the Christ we serve, not demanding our rights, but showing care and compassion for our neighbors.

Since this crisis began and the Shelter-in-place orders were given, the Cabinet and I have steadfastly advised that we should be a people who are guided by faith and not driven by fear. It is not out of fear that we call on the churches of the CTC to continue with online worship only. Rather, it is out of faithfulness – faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ who commands us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. There is a distinct difference between being fearless and being reckless, and it would be reckless to rush back into in-person worship since many of our congregations have faithful members and guests who are in the high-risk category.

However, while I cannot stress enough my belief that churches should not return to in-person worship for several more weeks, I remain committed that the decision of whether and when to return to in-person worship ultimately rests with the local churches **as long as they do so in consultation with their clergy, lay leadership and DS and follow ALL civil and medical orders and protocols.** I have already outlined a list of guidelines from the CTC’s perspective ([ctcumc.org/COVID-19-cabinet-guidelines](http://ctcumc.org/COVID-19-cabinet-guidelines)). Additionally, there are several health protocols prescribed in the Governor’s [Open Texas Report](#) that churches **must** follow in order to return to in-person worship, including...

- Health Protocols for Serving Church Attendees
  - Strongly encourage the “vulnerable/at-risk” population to worship remotely; reserve an area for the at-risk population or offer an “at-risk only” service; ensure non-family units sit six feet apart and leave every other pew row empty.
- Health Protocols for Your Facilities
  - Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces (doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms) and/or items that come in contact with attendees (hymnals, Bibles, etc.) between each service with CDC approved disinfectants – not just a wet cloth or furniture polish.
  - Make hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes (still in short supply) readily available
- Health Protocols for Staff & Volunteers
  - Train all employees and volunteers on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
  - Screen employees and volunteers before coming into the church, congregation, or place of worship and send them home if they demonstrate any new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19. Such as a cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit and/or known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19. (A complete list of possible COVID-19 symptoms is found on page 40 of the [Open Texas Report](#).)
  - Refrain from passing collection plates (provide a central collection box and encourage online giving) and offering childcare unless you comply with [CDC guidelines for childcare facilities](#).

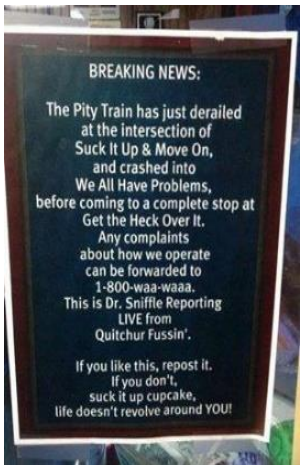
Please contact your District Superintendent with any questions or for additional guidance.

I want to personally thank each of you for your continued patience and the creativity you are showing in reaching out to each other and the community during this time. The Lord IS with us.

Yours in Christ,

**Bishop Mike Lowry**

Resident Bishop of the Central Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church



The Governor of Texas has categorized churches as essential and authorized them to reopen, following certain guidelines. Read the recommendation of Bishop Michael Lowry of our Annual Conference on the separate page.

AAHHHH.....

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition of an earwig is "Any of numerous insects (order Dermaptera) having slender many-jointed antennae and a pair of cerci resembling forceps at the end of the body." It's also slang for a song lyric that you can't get out of your head.

I've not had to deal with an earwig since my three-year old grandson taught me "Baby Shark." Until last week. I just could not get this lyric out of my head: "O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! / Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. / Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; / who to rescue me from danger interposed his precious blood." Longtime singing Methodists will recognize that as a confluence of verses 3 and 2 of "Come Thou Fount" (words by Robert Robinson, based on 1 Samuel 7:12).

The earwig lasted for hours. It was aggravating even though I love that song! But the reason it was so annoying was because God was telling me something I did not want to hear. I AM getting restless. I'm not accustomed to being home every day. I'm certainly not happy being separated from my children and grandchildren (7weeks, today). I miss seeing all of you, too. And preaching to a 3-inch by 6-inch smart phone is the PITS. And God said, "Yes. So what?"

Count on the Lord to be particularly honest.

The Covid19 virus has no cure and few effective treatments. Young and old have died. Young and old have recovered. New symptoms are still being discovered. Doctors don't know if those who recover from this corona virus will have immunity; remember, this is the same virus family as a cold. How many colds have you had in your life? People who study medical mysteries seem to agree that what we do NOT know about this virus is much greater than what we do. So caution is a prudent course.

Yet I still want to kiss and hug my little germ factories (also known as Harper and Oliver) and my grown children so tightly, that they tell me they can't breathe. But I cannot. So I will not. God reminded me that this is a matter of faith. God has blessed some people with the gift of healing, and those people are working night and day to care for those who are ill, and to find a cure. I don't have the gift of healing so I can't do anything to help them. Except pray. So that is what I do. And I must be on the right path because I've got another earwig!

"What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms? / I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms. / Leaning (on Jesus), Leaning (on Jesus), safe and secure from all alarms; / Leaning (on Jesus), Leaning (on Jesus), Leaning on the everlasting arms!" aaahhhh.....

Ann

Dr. Ann Hitt

P.S. Go to our FaceBook page or YouTube channel on Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and Join us for worship!

"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" words by Elisha A. Hoffman, 1887  
(based on Deuteronomy 33:27)

Please be in prayer for...

All who are ill  
All who mourn  
Those who are fearful  
Those who have lost their job  
Our Church  
Our country  
The world  
Yourself  
Me