



Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

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If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:1-4)

August 12, 2021

Dear Beloved Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World!

Many of us experienced some relief when the number of COVID cases in our region declined and the CDC announced that vaccinated people did not need to wear masks in public anymore. Many of our churches were able to start offering in-person worship (while still practicing safety recommendations).

Now, unfortunately, the number of COVID cases in many parts our conference are on the rise again. The Delta variant accounts for the vast majority of these new cases.

This variant is much more contagious and those who are not vaccinated are at the greatest risk. The unvaccinated—particularly children, for whom there is not yet an approved vaccine—are most likely to get seriously ill from this variant. A small minority of the vaccinated can experience breakthrough cases, but those are rarely serious.

I know that we all want to continue to worship together in our buildings. None of us wants to have to suspend in-person worship and religious gatherings for another season.

Reflecting on the recent trends in COVID transmission, I am convinced it is our responsibility as loving Christians to take the following precautions against spreading this new variant, especially to our children and others who are most vulnerable. If we faithfully observe these practices, we are more likely to be able to continue in-person worship and other activities. Health practitioners and others in our conference met to review the research and they offer the following recommendations. I wholeheartedly endorse these and strongly recommend them to our congregations and their safety/protocol teams.

- Our worshipers, including the vaccinated, are strongly encouraged to wear masks at all of our worship services, meetings, and gatherings.
- In our times together, please continue to practice social distancing.
- Pastors and congregational leaders: please urge people to get vaccinated. This is not a political statement, but rather a plea to avoid putting others at risk of sickness and even death. (Of course, the encouragement to get vaccinated does not apply to those who are too young or whose doctors advise against it.) As people of faith and leaders in our communities, we can share the most up-to-date, medically determined evidence and clarify misinformation.
- Those who are vulnerable: please, for your health and safety, do not attend in-person worship at this time.


I further encourage you to reconvene your safety/protocol team to review the current CDC guidelines and make recommendations to your leadership and congregation.

As people who are made whole by Christ, we observe these practices not only for our own wellbeing but especially for the health and safety of others. We know that Jesus taught us that the most important commandments are to love God and love others. We show our love and care for others by faithfully observing these protocols. In all of your considerations and practices, I implore you to put others first.

If you or your congregation has questions or would like to have a conversation with our advisory team, contact our conference disaster response coordinator, Doug Hoy (drc@susumc.org). Our excellent and very knowledgeable medical advisory group stands ready to assist you and your congregation. Please feel free to reach out to them. Together we can help put this pandemic behind us.

May God continue to bless your faithful and hope-filled spirits.

In Ministry with You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah J. Park". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Jeremiah J. Park