



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

303 Mulberry Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17050-3198
Phone (717) 766-7871 • Fax (717) 766-3210 • Email: bishoppark@susumc.org

Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

Christy Mackey
Executive Admin. Asst.
cmackey@susumc.org

Rev. Gregory C. Myers
Clergy Assistant
gmyers@susumc.org

Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver
Clergy Assistant
tsalsgiver@susumc.org

Sarah Filizzi
Admin. Assistant
sfilizzi@susumc.org

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear. . .
Be still, and know that I am God . . .
The Lord Almighty is with us.
(Psalm 46)*

March 17, 2020

Dear 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!

How can I thank my God enough for you and your faithfulness! In these rapidly changing times during the COVID-19 pandemic, you continue to find creative ways to offer worship and ministry. I know God's people and your neighbors are thankful for this.

In a press conference on March 16, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf announced a series of [required and recommended steps](#) to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the state, including the closure of dining-in services at restaurant and bars, restricting visitors from correctional facilities and nursing homes, and the closure of child-care centers, public schools, and other state licensed or provided services. He urges non-essential businesses and service providers to take steps to minimize person-to-person contact. This shutdown is to last for at least the next two weeks. It is time now for the people of Christ in the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church to do our part to help minimize the spread of this disease.

The first of John Wesley's rules is "do no harm." We must be vigilant in avoiding doing harm by making sure that we do not risk exposing people to COVID-19. If we do not act responsibly, we could endanger the lives of not only our church members but those with whom they may come into contact.

As your bishop, along with the leadership of the Annual Conference, **I implore our Susquehanna Conference churches to suspend all gatherings for worship and other activities for at least the next two weeks.** This is a very hard decision, especially because we are in the midst of Lent, one of the most sacred seasons of the church year. However, during the time of suspension we can be more intentional and focused on the Lenten disciplines of solitude, reflection, and repentance. This season can help us deepen our spiritual connection to Holy Week and ultimately Easter, when we celebrate new life.

Suspending in-person worship and ministry is difficult for not only theological considerations, but also for practical concerns. The temporary closures of church day-care centers and senior ministries may create more stresses for those who are already disadvantaged. Despite these essential limits on in-person contact, we can still offer compassionate ministry to our neighbors. We will include suggestions on the conference web site.

I know that our people are faithful and resourceful. I pray that, while you do not gather for worship or ministry, you seek ways to remain in community. At the end of this letter you will find some resources to help you continue to minister to members and neighbors without requiring in-person contact. There are many ways that we can worship, participate in group Bible study, and care for our members without meeting in the same physical space.

Pastors and lay persons might want to post and/or email daily Bible readings or post video devotionals online. Remind churchgoers to check in with one another over the phone, especially with those who are particularly vulnerable. While we encourage all to be safe, our prayers of protection go with many in our midst who need to continue to go out to their employment in order to preserve their economic security.

I also encourage all of us to continue to be faithful in our giving even while we are not meeting for weekly worship. If your church does not offer online giving opportunities or automatic withdrawal, please mail your regular giving check to your church during this time. Even though you cannot physically place your tithes and offerings in the offering plate, you can still make sure that your church's ministry continues with the necessary financial support.

In addition to asking our people to not gather together in person, the conference leaders and I are working diligently to make sure that the staff of our Conference Center are practicing what the health experts strongly recommend. Starting today, many of our staff will be working remotely. We can assure you that emails will be returned, phone calls will be answered, and we will continue to work in ministry partnership with you.

To minimize visits to the Conference Center, Discovery Place will be closed to walk-in visitors for at least two weeks. Materials can still be requested by email (discovery@susumc.org). In addition, we encourage you to contact us by email or phone rather than coming to the office.

Let's continue to offer ardent prayers for those whose medical conditions or living situations make them vulnerable to the virus, for those who care for them, and for the researchers who strive to find a vaccine.

Indeed, we are living through unprecedented times. As the body of Christ, we have a unique responsibility and opportunity to provide leadership and guidance through this crisis. We should set examples for our communities and the nation, and we should do so in obedience to the calling we have to minister to one another and to serve as beacons of light to the hurting world.

Even in the midst of this pandemic, we can be assured that God is our present help and that God in Jesus Christ is faithful. May we know the embrace of the Holy Spirit's presence, wisdom and peace as we participate in a deliverance for health and wholeness.

In ministry with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah Park", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Jeremiah Park

Resources:

[Learn more about COVID-19: Pennsylvania Department of Health](#)

[Ministry and Outreach Suggestions](#)

[How to Livestream Your Church Services for Free](#)

[Free Conference Calls](#)

[Google Hangouts Meetings](#)

<https://outreach.com/blog/best-church-online-giving-platforms/>

Find more resources at the <https://www.susumc.org/covid-19/>. This page will be updated from time to time.