

Presbytery of Missouri River Valley Guidance Regarding Re-Opening of Churches in the Days of COVID-19

In light of considerations stated by PC(USA) and in the White House guidance document, “Opening America” and statements made by the medical community, and health officials, PMRV Leadership recommends no in-person worship until such a time that there is additional guidance from these sources. There must also be a decrease in COVID-19 cases for a minimum of 14 continuous days and assurance from state health officials that Nebraska and Iowa have achieved Phase 1 category and have entered Phase 2. PMRV Leadership Team cannot place a definite date or a specific timeline for reopening and will monitor PC(USA) and information from Iowa and Nebraska prior to providing a specific date for re-opening. No in-person worship should be conducted until further guidance is provided.

The PMRV Leadership Team has prayerfully considered when it might be advisable to resume in-person corporate worship within our churches. While it may be “legal” in the opinion of State Leaders, we as a faith community must also consider the safety of our members and our commitment to doing what seems right as we listen for God’s guidance and our call to serve as examples of a faith-filled life.

Since mid-March PMRV churches have been conducting worship in new ways. PMRV Ministers have quickly engaged creatively to provide congregations with meaningful worship in a context that is suitable for the congregations he/she serves. PMRV congregations are continuing to participate in supporting individual churches. Factually, demographics of church membership must to be considered moving forward. All PMRV congregations serve large numbers of members who are categorized as “high-risk.” It is that faithful group who will come to church if it is held. Does this Presbytery or any church within its boundaries want to be the source of an outbreak of COVID-19?

During a Zoom meeting with Mid-Council Leaders on Friday, April 24, 2020, Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk, PC(USA) General Assembly, advised that now is not the time to return to in-person worship. An accompanying article from Presbyterian Mission Agency can be found at this link: https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/flattening-the-curve-means-keeping-churches-closed-for-now-leaders-say/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Daily+Coronavirus+briefing+and+News+from+the+Presbyterian+Church+%28U+S+A%29&utm_campaign=Covid-19-daily+news+-+April+24%2C+2020

Leadership Team also reviewed the phase-in plan offered by the White House. That document can be found by going to the following link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/> Guidance issued by the White House clearly outlines specific requirements for re-opening America. The Leadership Team believes that a phase-in process is appropriate for re-engaging in-person worship. **Phase 1** of the process requires **fourteen (14) days of decreasing numbers of rates of infection attributed to COVID-19** and decreasing deaths. Neither Iowa or Nebraska are at that threshold. In fact, neither state has even reached what might be deemed peak occurrence of COVID-19. Following a continuous 14 days of diminishing rates of infection of COVID-19, gatherings of 50 would be possible as Phase 2 is entered. Nebraska and Iowa are clearly not near that threshold either.

PMRV Sessions are encouraged to adopt a COVID-19 policy that follows the guidance from PC(USA) and Presbytery of Missouri River Valley.

PMRV Leadership Team acknowledges the hardship this may cause. However, at this time the safety and health of our members, ministers, and staff are the prime consideration for this action.