



Dear Siblings in Christ:

The Presbytery Council held a special called meeting on Friday, November 6, to consider whether to offer additional guidance to congregations concerning in-person, indoor worship. Contributing to our conversation were the following:

> We are receiving reports of an increasing number of positive cases for persons within the presbytery, including two pastors (please know that pastors who have tested positive have informed their congregations and are taking appropriate steps to protect the health and safety of those around them).

> Indiana continues to show record numbers of new COVID-19 cases. In many counties, public schools have returned to e-learning.

> We hear the warnings from infectious disease experts that we are entering a particularly dangerous phase of the pandemic characterized by: two major holidays on the horizon, an influenza season that will exacerbate the current public health crisis, and colder temperatures that will force gatherings to move indoors.

> As the need to move indoors increases, with windows closed and the furnace on, the virus spreads more rapidly. And while wearing masks and being physically distant do make a difference, prolonged indoor exposure to others – even with these precautions – increases the risk of community spread. This is especially true when the number of new cases and the rate of infection continues to rise.

> People with the virus are infectious two or more days before they show symptoms, if they show symptoms at all (up to 40% never really do). The virus can cause serious, long-lasting consequences across an array of body symptoms: organ damage, including heart, lung, kidney, liver and pancreas; micro-clots causing strokes, even in young people, as well as seizures and cognitive impairment, along with other neurologic consequences.

Given these concerns, the Presbytery Council recommends that sessions and pastors of congregations who have been gathering for in-person, indoor worship re-evaluate their decisions. Please know that we are not directing session to make a particular decision; neither the Council nor the Presbytery has the authority to do so. We are, instead,

expressing our concern for the congregations of this presbytery.

These decisions are difficult, to be sure. And each context is different. To help you in your decision making:

1. We encourage you to visit the [COVID Act Now](#) website to learn more about the situation in your own county.
2. We are pleased to invite you to a Zoom conversation with Elder Lisa Allgood, the Transitional Executive Presbyter of the Cincinnati Presbytery. She is also Dr. Lisa Allgood, an immunocytochemist who spent 36 years in the pharmaceutical industry running human clinical trials and working with CDC and FDA. Lisa has been bringing her expertise to presbyteries and presbytery leaders around the denomination. She will meet with us on Wednesday, November 18, at 1:30pm EST / 12:30pm CST, to give us the latest information on the coronavirus and how it's spread, and to answer any questions you may have. This meeting will be offered to clerks and pastors. A Zoom link will be sent later.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and for all the ways that you seek to be faithful in these strange and unsettling times. We continue to long for and hope for the day when we will see one another with uncovered face, when we will be able to sing together and share a meal together, when we will be able to serve side-by-side. Most of all, however, we hope that we will continue to exercise sound judgement and strong faith, waiting on the Lord, who gives us all that we need in every circumstance.

On behalf of the Presbytery Council —
Peace and all good,

The Rev'd. Susan C. McGhee
Executive Presbyter
The Presbytery of Ohio Valley