

Bishop Sally Dyck response to President calling for reopening of churches: "Churches need to remain closed"

To the clergy and laity of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference:

As many of you may have heard, President Trump this morning called for the reopening of all houses of worship throughout the country. He rightly recognizes that we need “more prayer, not less,” but doesn’t realize that people, including the people called United Methodist, have been praying and worshipping all along through these months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bishop Frank Beard of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and I are united in stating that we are calling on all United Methodist churches in Illinois to honor the regional and phased-in plan of “Restore Illinois,” which Governor J.B. Pritzker has outlined for us.

Therefore, none of our churches are to open at this time.

Undoubtedly, some regions across Illinois in the near future will be allowed to progress to new phases that would allow a maximum of 50 people to gather, while following guidelines to help eliminate further suffering and death from the coronavirus.

Our founder John Wesley urged us to practice “do no harm.” Recent reports from parts of the country where churches have opened indicated some devastating outcomes, leading to illness and death – even while practicing the best social distancing (at least in theory). Just because something is “legal,” doesn’t mean that it is beneficial.

Shortly after Memorial Day weekend, we will be putting out our ReTurn Team’s guidelines for returning to various ministries based on the best practices and scientific data that can be determined at this time. Please watch for that document, which will be sent out via email and on the website.

Please “love your neighbor” and do not open for worship at this time! Thank you for your willingness to stay the course—worship with each other online or through other means until we have greater assurance that it is safe to come together again.

God bless you and keep you safe!

Sincerely,

Bishop Sally Dyck