



Illinois South Conference COVID-19 Response UPDATE #1, March 16, 2020

To Illinois South Conference pastors, church leaders and congregations:

This will be the first regular update from your Conference Council and Conference Minister. Together with you, we face uncharted waters with the COVID-19 pandemic. We know these stressful times call us to support and care for each other to the best of our abilities, and with the best knowledge we have at a given moment.

Even since last week, what seemed far away is now in our backyard. St. Clair and Clinton Counties reported confirmed COVID-19 cases over the weekend. As one doctor said, "It's going to get a lot worse before it gets better." We know that those over age 60 or with underlying health conditions are most at risk, and that describes a good portion of our congregations.

We are being told self-isolation and social distancing are currently the only ways to slow down the spread of this disease. This means more people stay healthy, and those who get sick can get treatment from a healthcare system that is not over capacity. While some of us might not be particularly susceptible, we all know someone who is. These are uncertain times for all of us.

With this in mind, the Conference Council passed this motion today:

To address the COVID-19 pandemic and given the new recommendations that were issued over the weekend:

1. **The Conference Council recommends all ISC congregations suspend in-person worship and meetings for a minimum of four weeks, until April 13, 2020, with date subject to revision as we receive more information.** Individual congregations may prefer a longer period, such as six weeks (April 27), or eight weeks (May 11, recommended by the Center for Disease Control.) We suggest that congregations consider this action regardless of attendance size.

We realize this window of time includes Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. However, the reason for this is that staying inside and apart for a few weeks will be not be as effective if suddenly large groups of people gather on Easter. It risks a wave of new infections right when infection rates might be spiking, if the US continues to follow the COVID-19 patterns of other countries. Decisions such as these are not easy and we imagine more difficult decisions are to come.

Please read below for options to continue worship in other ways, along with best practice suggestions if your congregation decides to continue in-person worship.

2. **The Conference Council will direct the staff at the Conference office in Highland and DuBois Center offices to close to the public beginning today, March 16, and to remain closed until April 13, 2020, with date subject to revision.** Staff in both locations will continue working and receive full pay. Emails and phone calls will be answered, and mail will be received.

All events at DuBois Center will be cancelled through April 13. At this time, we do not have a full picture of the summer camp situation. We encourage campers to continue to register. If we need to cancel future events, we will fully refund all camp or event fees.

3. The Conference Council directs all Conference committees, teams, and task forces to suspend in-person meetings until April 13, 2020, with date subject to revision.

If your committee/team members have the ability, you can use video (ZOOM) or teleconferencing to hold meetings. Other options are meetings by email and the good old telephone.

For churches who are suspending in-person worship:

If you do not currently stream your worship services, do not worry. A ZOOM account for a church is \$15 a month, and it works on a smartphone, tablet, or computer. You simply create a meeting, or worship space in this case, that congregants can connect to with audio, video, or both. No computer or social media account required. Our Conference Minister, Rev. Shana Johnson, will be holding an online basic training session on this if you are new to ZOOM. <https://zoom.us>

Pastors, you can preach, lead prayer and still connect with your congregations during this time. You do not have to be perfect to share the Good News from your phone.

Pastors will be working overtime during this health crisis, but congregations can help by calling or texting one another. Social distancing does not have to mean mental isolation, so check in on people frequently.

Ask congregants to continue to support the congregation financially, through online giving if you use that, or by mailing checks to the church. So many people will need financial help through this crisis, and our churches must be strong to fill that need.

For churches continuing in-person worship:

Practice social distancing- no passing of the peace, handshakes, hugging, or sitting within six feet of another person.

Door handles and pews should be wiped down with disinfectant before and after services. Refrain from using hymnals, or disinfect them before and after services as well.

Prop exterior and bathroom doors open, so no one has to touch handles.

Encourage anyone who is sick, or in a vulnerable risk group to stay home.

Ask congregants to continue to support the congregation financially, through online giving if you use that, or by mailing checks to the church. Even if you have in-person services, you should expect dramatically reduced attendance.

Care for your hourly workers including secretarial staff, musicians, and other staff affected by suspending in person worship, meetings, and events.

For everyone:

We have heard from pastors that some funeral homes are only doing cremation and family-only services. If you have a congregational death during this time, be prepared to comfort those grieving with the knowledge that there will be a memorial service down the road.

Look out for those who do not have an income right now. Help with food and utility bills, as you are able. Many hourly workers are impacted by business closures and they have no safety net.

- Connect parents and children to information on how to get breakfast and lunch meals they are missing from not being at school. Every school district seems to be doing something to keep kids fed, but they are all doing it a little differently.
- If you are on Facebook, connect to the Illinois South Conference page and the DuBois Center page. Also make sure you are checking the Conference website, iscucc.org, and that you are receiving the Conference newsletter (Weekly Connection) to keep informed and updated on resources for your local church. Information will be on all of these platforms as soon as it is available.

If ever there was a time show love to neighbor, it is now.

Together in Christ's Ministry with you,

Dr. Jill Baker, Conference Moderator	Rev. Rosemary Captain
Rev. Christy Eckert, Conference Vice-Moderator	Ms. Virginia Ilch
Mr. Dwight Asselmeier, Conference Treasurer	Rev. R.J. Morgan
Rev. Ivan Horn, Conference Secretary	Rev. Mike Southcombe
Rev. Shana Johnson, IL South Conference Minister	Ms. Barbara VanAusdall