

Dear Indiana Church Member:

Due to the increase of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) confirmed cases in the state of Indiana, there has been a growing concern about the impact this will have on our church communities, schools, and homes. This is certainly a challenging time, as it puts individuals at risk and greatly disrupts the lives of many in our community. We are seeing a specific fulfillment of prophecy as found in Matthew 24.

The Indiana Conference is carefully monitoring the rapid developments and has been consulting the CDC recommendations as well as adhering to the mandates given to us from state officials and local health authorities. We have been praying that God will give wisdom and direction as we attempt to make the best decisions that will ensure the safety of all.

As with many other churches, we are asking that every church member follow preventative measures recommended by the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>). We are also asking our congregations to follow Governor Holcomb's ban of gatherings above 250 people in a shared space (<https://calendar.in.gov/site/gov/event/gov-holcomb-announces-new-steps-to-protect-public-from-covid-19/>). Those who are at higher risk for developing serious illness from COVID-19 such as older adults and people with chronic medical conditions should avoid large gatherings altogether, including worship services and other social and church events.

PROTOCOL FOR CHURCHES

1. Ask your members to worship on-line from home if they: have active cold or flu symptoms; have recently (last two weeks) traveled in a CDC level three country (wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/); have reason to believe they have recently been exposed to people infected with the virus; or are senior citizens and/or have underlying chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease.

2. Make special efforts, using appropriate safety measures, to stay connected with and support those that must stay home, especially the elderly, as they are at special risk for loneliness and depression during times of extended isolation.

3. Ask church attendees not to give hugs and handshakes, and to maintain a safe social distance from others (generally three feet or more); we strongly recommend that Communion service be suspended for the Spring quarter.

4. Provide anti-septic soap dispensers (with 60% alcohol content, if available) at all church entrances, with signs indicating a no handshake zone; have greeters place bulletins on tables or trays for people to pick up, rather than handing them out.

5. Avoid hand-holding prayer or singing sessions; organize the children's story time to avoid contact among the children, and; find alternate ways to take up the children's or "lamb's offering," especially during March and April.

6. Do not pass offering plates; place plates in the back, or the front, to be used as people leave.

7. Provide alcohol wipes and regularly clean high-touch surfaces, like door handles, stair rails, drinking fountains, light switches, and Sabbath School room tables after use, especially in the children's Sabbath Schools.

8. Consider cancelling potlucks and community meals, at least for the months of March and April. If group meals happen, use food servers with gloves rather than allowing self-service.

9. Share reliable information from church and government agencies, such as www.cdc.gov, that will help promote safe practices, and that will defuse stereotypes and myths. For instance, it is not true that certain immigrant groups or nationalities are causing the spread of the virus within the United States, and there is simply no evidence that the virus was engineered or intentionally spread.

10. Plan health nuggets in Sabbath School and church reminding people of immune-system boosting behaviors, such as getting regular exercise, sunshine, good sleep, and avoiding excess sugars. The Adventist health message provides an anti-Coronavirus behavior template, let's share it that way!

For tithes and offerings, when members are not able to attend worship services, they may take advantage of Adventist Giving Online (<https://adventistgiving.org/#/>). They may also mail checks to their local church.

PROTOCOL FOR SCHOOLS

Various Indiana counties/school districts are determining what their public and private schools need to do regarding school closures. We are monitoring these developments and will communicate the latest news to the principals of our schools. We are asking for each conference school to comply with the school guidelines issued by the Indiana Department of Education (<https://www.doe.in.gov/safety/health/covid-19-resources-indiana-schools>), as well as to follow the mandates of local health departments. To determine which schools are currently affected, please consult the Education Superintendent of the Indiana Conference.

CANCELLED EVENTS

Please note that Sabbath Celebration, the IA Music Festival, and the ASI Convention have all been cancelled. News of the status of *Your Best Pathways to Health* will be available early next week. Indiana Conference and the *It is Written* leadership team have agreed to cancel the upcoming evangelistic meetings in Indianapolis in April and are looking at other avenues of sharing God's message to our city, since we are not able to meet in large gatherings at this time. We ask for prayer that God will guide us and give us wisdom as we move forward to accomplish God's work in our area.

PILLARS OF HOPE

Last week Elder Wilson shared with local church and city leaders that Seventh-day Adventists are to be anchors of stability and pillars of hope during chaotic and dark times. I too believe this is God's call for us at this time in earth's history. The future is impossible to predict. The global situation is changing rapidly, even by the hour. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul writes, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." During uncertain times we are to place our trust in God and His Word. He has promised to be "our rock and refuge, a very present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1, 2). We invite each of you to pray for our city, state, country, and world. Instead of operating from fear, let us continue to find ways to minister to those in our communities who are hurting and in great need of God's love and compassion. One

day soon our Lord Jesus will come and put an end to all the sickness and suffering in our world. May we point others to the blessed hope that we have in Jesus and His soon return.

In His Service,

Pastor Vic