



## **Covid-19 Response: A Statement from the Denominational Leaders of the Kentucky Council of Churches**

*"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." --Romans 8:37-39*

Governor Beshear and members of the Kentucky Covid-19 response team met with Kentucky Council of Churches Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II, council president, Rev. Kent Gilbert, and judicatory leaders or representatives from our member communions of the Council in a special conference call Wednesday evening.

On Wednesday morning, March 11, the governor issued guidance that houses of worship consider cancelling services for this and possibly succeeding weeks. Presentations in our meeting by Gov. Beshear and Dr. Steven Stack, Kentucky Commissioner for Public Health and former president of the AMA, outlined the special concern for any gathering where droplet transmission could be increased. Churches are such places, and often populated by those most at risk.

"I know it is a big step, but I can tell you the direct connection between at least two Harrison County residents is that they go to church together," Gov. Beshear said according to an article in the Lexington Herald-Leader. "We would not be suggesting" that these services should be canceled "if we did not believe this coronavirus can be or is currently being spread in those areas."

With the Covid-19 task force, the bishops, conference ministers, and denominational representatives of the KCC meeting affirm that protection of the most vulnerable and the care of our neighbor is a primary goal as we navigate this world-wide pandemic.

We commend the Governor for his transparent and assertive caution to slow the spread of the virus and to keep Kentuckians informed. We join him in urging every congregation to actively engage in efforts to reduce the risk of infection as appropriate to each church and denominational setting, whether curtailing services and activities or by making them as safe as possible for participants.

The Governor and Covid19 task force are recommending the following best practices and urge churches to take seriously their vital role as leaders for health:

- Large gatherings of people should be cancelled, postponed, or done virtually in order to the community spread of COVID-19 to the most vulnerable people; those over the age of 60, and those with underlying health issues, including someone with diabetes, heart, lung and kidney disease.
- Vocal choirs are of particular concern because of close proximity and droplet contamination from singing. Churches who do not cancel services should consider suspending rehearsals or limiting participation. Two of the Harrison County, KY infections were likely transmitted by church choir rehearsal exposure.

- For those congregations who choose to remain open, the KCC along with the governor's task force recommends following the CDC protocols for "social distancing" and proper hygiene procedures. Some of these include encouraging those over 60 to stay home, altering greetings and church ritual to avoid as much droplet contamination as possible, and to keep a physical distance of 6 feet whenever possible. You can find those recommendations and more concerning communion, offering, and other service needs here:

Listed here are resources for congregations and other faith-based organizations as we formulate plans to slow infection rates:

- The CDC guidance for Faith-based Organizations: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>
- The Kentucky Covid19 Official Website: [www.kycovid19.ky.gov](http://www.kycovid19.ky.gov)
- Jeremy Smith, a United Methodist pastor produced this specific guide for churches in Seattle with consultation from other clergy and local health officials. <http://hackingchristianity.net/2020/03/i-pastor-a-church-near-a-covid-19-outbreak-this-is-what-churches-can-do.html>
- Many denominations have also produced their own guidance. We encourage you to check with your denominational office or website.

Gov. Beshear informed us of his intent to include the Kentucky Council of Churches in the circle of advance communication from the Covid-19 task force. We welcome this chance to keep our congregations and all of Kentucky informed and knowledgeable. We will be actively and regularly sharing information to constituent member bodies as conditions evolve. Those with questions may contact Rev. Dr. Gillett who will act as conduit for the KCC.

While we affirm that not every recommendation may be possible for every congregation, we know that *inaction* is neither faithful nor wise. As we remember that the heart of Christian ministry is service to and love of our neighbor, so too we remember that every act to prevent the spread of disease is an expression of that holy discipline. If in this season we must change our ways for the sake of our neighbor's health, then as Paul reminds us in Romans, "in these things we are more than conquerors... for nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

In Christ's Peace,



Rev. Kent Gilbert  
KCC Executive Board President  
On behalf of the Council and Gathered Leaders



Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II  
KCC Executive Director

The Kentucky Council of Churches is comprised of the following member bodies: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Church in KY, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Presbyterian Church USA, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Union Church, Berea, representing more than 800,000 Kentuckians in over 1100 congregations statewide.