



*Continuing the work of Jesus.
Peacefully. Simply. Together.*

MID-ATLANTIC DISTRICT
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

Friday, March 20, 2020

Dear Mid-Atlantic Members and Friends,

We are in the midst of an increasingly trying and nerve-wracking crisis. My prayers are with you and our communities for health, strength, and peace, and with our health care providers that they may be safe and strong as they extend themselves to care for us.

I received a constant stream of communications yesterday from congregations that are canceling worship services for at least the next couple of Sundays. I am recommending, urging every Mid-Atlantic congregation to immediately cancel all on-site worship services, meetings, and gatherings through Good Friday, April 10. I will be back in touch with you by April 3 with recommendations about Easter and April.

My recommendation is in harmony with current state and federal recommendations. Simply put, every public interaction we have puts ourselves and others at risk of catching and spreading this virus, which potentially adds to the strain on our care health providers and systems, a strain which could quickly cause the failure of health care systems, and deaths. I cannot stress this enough. It is critical over the next few weeks that you stay home as much as you can, and pray for the health and wellbeing of those who are out there supporting us in the service sectors. Because of the “community spread” dynamic of this virus every interaction poses a risk to yourself and others. “Every hand and object you touch has been touched by other hands ...;” “seven degrees of separation,” or less.

It’s no small thing to recommend cancelling Lenten and Holy Week services. I know some of you are moving to online and streaming worship and meetings. Just please be aware that as more of us do that it may place an overwhelming burden on internet band width, creating a problem for doctors and health care systems that need access to the internet. If warnings or requests come out in that regard, please heed them. I encourage all of our pastors and congregations to figure out some system of phone calling to check in on each other and maintain connections. This could be a time to read a book of the Bible at a sitting, to do some journaling of thoughts and feelings through this crisis, or to do some common in-home reading or studying program. As my colleague Glenn McCrickard commented to me this week, “Anxious time for us all, but an occasion to learn and grow in ministry.” Yes it is.

District administrative assistant Jo Ann Landon and I are continuing to work, both basically from home but with the occasional trip into the office, where we will observe the recommended six feet of “social distancing.” You can continue to reach Jo Ann through the office phone, 443-

960-3052, and at aamad@brethren.org. Jo Ann is checking on messages regularly. She's getting in some good time on the district directory, and coordinating with the meat canning committee, and Jeff McKee on the district auction. She'll keep you posted on important updates. I spend so much time on the road that I'm appreciating this time to do some long-deferred writing including attention to updating important district policies, and to catch up on reading. You can be in touch with me through the office number, my email at DEMAD@brethren.org, and in an emergency on my cell: 717-479-1066. Please let the office know if you or any member of your congregation gets coronavirus. I want to pray for you, and stay aware of how it may be affecting our district family.

If any pastors would like the opportunity for a Zoom videocom with me and other colleagues next Wednesday or Thursday, March 25 or 26, at 10 a.m. or 2 p.m. on either day, please respond to Jo Ann at aamad@brethren.org with your first and second best day and time, and the email address you'd like your Zoom link sent to, and Jo Ann will schedule you in, sending you an email with the link to click on. It can be an hour to an hour-and-a-half to share information, thoughts, feelings, concerns, encouragement, and prayers with each other. Until then you are in my thoughts and prayers.

Together on the Journey,

Gene Hagenberger

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene Hagenberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mid-Atlantic District Executive Minister