



In this season of Thanksgiving, I give thanks to God for each one of you during these challenging days. I also am praying that you will serve as a model for the highest and the best in Christian character as we continue to navigate these stormy waters with the Covid-19 pandemic. As I said in March to you, during times of difficulty and challenge, you just may be the only Jesus some folks will ever see!

We are not the same people we were eight months ago. Many have embraced ministry in new, creative and innovative ways. And we have continued to serve others in the name of Christ outside the four walls of a building.

As you are aware, the entire state of Illinois is seeing alarmingly high positivity rates. All of the state is under mitigation measures and two of the six regions in Illinois have moved to a second, stricter, stage of mitigation and the possibility of the remaining regions could come any day.

For the good of our 800 congregations and communities where they reside, I am instructing our churches not to meet for indoor worship for the next four weeks (Nov. 22, 29, Dec. 6 and 13). On Dec. 9, a determination will be made for Christmas Eve and Christmas services in the weeks to follow.

Using the information from the *Pressing On* document which was developed recently by the IGRC Extended Cabinet:

- Indoor or outdoor in-person church services and gatherings should not be held.
- Churches may gather for drive-in worship services of any size with proper distancing (refer to the *Pressing On* document for details).
- For the purpose of producing or broadcasting worship, groups of 10 or less may gather with facemasks and proper social distancing
- Church buildings should close, and staff should work from home, except for essential and minimum, basic operations that need to be conducted in the building such as social service ministries.

In addition to gatherings of people at home, bars, restaurants and church have been the places where contact tracing have shown to be the sources of the greatest spread.

I am also aware that this is usually a time of planned giving. We have the capacity to give; my hope is that we will have the desire to give more. Here are my suggestions:

- Don't wait to be asked to give above and beyond. Be a pacesetter and model for others to emulate.
- Participate in electronic giving, if possible and available. Checks are still accepted!
- Encourage others to give by reminding them of the need to keep ministry funds flowing so that the work of Christ is not hampered.
- Make sure that the pastor(s) gets paid. The pastors will be working even if the church is not gathering. Many will have increased responsibilities during this crisis.
- Keep everyone employed! Now is not the time to reduce or cut church ministry staff.
- Make sure that our missionaries and outreach centers continue to receive adequate funding.
- Pay your apportionments! This will enable us to keep the IGRC ministries strong and vital.

In March, you met the challenge of "flattening the curve," which resulted in us being able to reopen. There has also been hopeful news about at least two vaccines on the horizon that may be able to combat this virus. But what we do now will affect how long such mitigation measures will need to be employed. The IGRC Extended Cabinet and I are asking for your assistance in this matter.

God bless,
Bishop Frank J. Beard