



May 21, 2020

Dear Pastors and Lay Ministers of the Central Valley District,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ Jesus as we continue to “Shelter in Place” as a way of concretely loving our neighbors and collaborating to minimize the negative impact of the COVID19 virus on the health of our communities.

Many of you have contacted me in the last week wondering when we will receive the next set of protocols to guide our planning for worship and ministry for June. Others have notified me that their municipalities or counties are moving more quickly to re-open than recommended by our state officials and wondering how this might impact our local United Methodist Churches.

Let me take this opportunity to clarify that the protocols for our conference are in place through May 31, 2020 and our churches are to remain closed until then regardless of what local municipal and county protocols might permit. You can find the protocol here on the conference website for your review.

<http://calnev-email.brtapp.com/files/disaster+response/ncov-19/local+church+protocols+3.27.20.pdf>

We have several teams working on behalf of our whole conference to develop protocols for all of us to use. You are not alone and do not have to develop them all on your own! You will have to implement and apply them in your own context. Here’s what we are working on:

1. “Drive-In Church” protocol – will be available this week on the Corona Virus page of the conference website. The link will be in the next Instant Connection. Pastor Bob Gilberg was the key leader of our conference team in developing this protocol. Our District Lay Leader Diana Bulls helped with the effort as well. The Firebaugh-Mendota UMC and the Montague UMC trialed the protocol last Sunday with good results. Thank you and good work, Pastor Bob!
2. Preschool Re-Opening Protocols – will also be available this week on our conference website and the link sent in the Instant Connection. Pastor Richard Thompson of Bakersfield, First and Pastor Lisa Brown from Manteca, St. Paul’s were pastoral leaders from our district who worked on the conference team. Thank you, Pastors!
3. Church Re-Opening Protocols – this work is underway. Pastor Jason Thornton, Manteca St. Paul’s is a key leader on this conference team. Bishop Carcaño will send this out to all of us when they are complete (likely the end of next week) and provide guidance for our protocols for the month of June.

4. Annual Conference Session (ACS) – Bishop Carcaño is working with our Commission on the ACS and others to provide guidance about our protocols. They are in communication with local officials in Stanislaus County and our event host. If you ask me a question about ACS, my answer is “I don’t know. Let’s wait and see how things unfold.”

I realize that this timing doesn’t give you much time to work with your local leaders to adapt to new protocols for June. However, just because things might become more permissive or flexible, does not mean you have to implement them immediately. You can be more restrictive than the protocol if this is wise for your context. You can take your time in planning to ensure you have created thoughtful and safe processes. You should assume that social distancing and extra sanitization will be required. You and your leaders should think about the physical space and layout you have and how things might work. Just do not implement until you hear from Bishop Carcaño.

You will likely find that some of your people will not be ready to return to worship in person until there is a vaccine. Your leaders could help you think how you might continue with your digital, live-stream, and mailed worship experiences and resources. I believe that most of you have been reaching new people with the creative ways you have found to be church. They may never show up physically at your location. But keep ministering to and disciplining them! Indeed, one of the unexpected outcomes has been the very quick and creative adaptations you all have made. I’m so impressed and grateful for your excellent leadership! I’ve been nourished by your messages, music, devotions, and meetings. I appreciate the ways you are providing congregational care. Each week I see you learning more and trying new things and improving your skills. You all have been figuring out how to create new places for new people!

I hope those of you who received a PPP loan saw Diane Knudsen’s letter on Monday. Please respond to her questions quickly. She has provided helpful information and a link to the loan forgiveness application.

Please also note that Selby Ewing, our Communications Director, is coordinating a conference celebration of our graduates. Please watch for her letter and participate!

Please read your Instant Connection each week to receive the latest news, protocols, and resources. Please encourage every elected leader in your church to subscribe so that they can also stay connected and help you lead.

Many of you are caring for congregations and members in grief and sorrow and finding creative ways to celebrate the joys of graduation and birth. You are investing extra hours as you create content and manage all the technology. We are living with the tension of leading during sustained uncertainty. So, please also observe sabbath rest. We are being invited into a new level of deepening our faith and trust in God. I hold you in my prayers each day. You inspire me and I’m so grateful to be in ministry with you.

Walking with you as we follow Jesus,  
Debra Brady.