



The United Methodist Church
The Philadelphia Area Episcopal Office

Peggy A. Johnson
Bishop

Eastern Pennsylvania Conference
Peninsula-Delaware Conference



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A Season of Darkness and Light

By Bishop Peggy A. Johnson

I bid you grace and peace, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, during this season of darkness and light. It is literally dark this time of year by 4:30 pm, and the sun does not come up before 7:00 am.

It is also the season of a deadly pandemic, which has cast a pall of loss and sadness on every human activity, including our regular church functions. With infections, hospitalizations and deaths all rising each day, along with our fatigue from enduring so many months of this crisis, we are most assuredly living in a time of darkness.

Our faith teaches us that light is more powerful than darkness, goodness overcomes evil, and as people of the light, we bring hope through the power of God's Spirit. **With that in mind, I urge the people called Methodists to prayerfully consider heeding with urgency, the recent mandates ordered by the governor of the state of Pennsylvania. Governor Tom Wolf has called for at least three weeks of exercising extreme caution and avoidance of public gatherings from December 12 to January 4, 2021.**

These new restrictions are a crucial attempt to stem the turbulent, rising tide of COVID-19 infections and the heavy toll it is taking on so many lives and families. **The new guidelines call for gatherings of no more than 10 people indoors and no more than 50 people outdoors. [Philadelphia's "Safer at Home" restrictions](#) are even more stringent. These restrictions will surely curtail Christmas worship services and gatherings a great deal; but I firmly believe it is a wise, potentially lifesaving decision to do so.**

I am well aware that religious entities are exempt from these kinds of government mandates; but I still believe that pastors and churches need to lean toward



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extreme caution in these extreme circumstances. Please follow these new mandates. Doing so will save lives, reduce overcrowding of hospitals, and protect our churches from blame if someone contracts the virus from a church attender.

These wise cautions are works of light, poking holes in this present darkness of disease, in order to protect our families and neighbors. And there are certainly other important ways to be light-bearers during this still-special time of year:

- Continue to give generously to your churches and to mission.
- Support restaurants that have had to close indoor dining by purchasing from them online or through delivery and carry-out service.
- Support local businesses that now must operate at reduced capacity.
- Give to the poor and to places that serve the poor, since these new restrictions will drastically affect many livelihoods.
- Give a “shout out” of encouragement and thanks to frontline health care professionals and service providers.
- Get tested and do quarantine if you are feeling sick or have been exposed to someone who has tested positive.
- Wear protective masks at all times, except when at home with immediate family members.
- Hold all holiday gatherings virtually.
- Keep washing your hands and using hand sanitizer.

The dawn of hope for the conquest of this disease will come faster if we all work together and follow these mandates. The vaccines are going to help eventually. But for now, we are responsible for taking care of ourselves and each other by doing our part. Let us all choose to be bearers of light and hope.

Sincerely,

Resident Bishop