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April 9, 2020

Dear Stark County Religious Leaders:

This Easter week is highly significant to our faith community and the desire to gather may feel greater during this time of social distancing and increased isolation.

If you are considering holding in-person services for Easter, please keep Governor DeWine's statement from his press conference on April 7, 2020 in mind, "...Any pastor who brings people together in close proximity to each other, a large group of people, is making a huge mistake. It is not a Christian thing to do. It is not in the Judeo-Christian tradition to hurt people and I'm sure no one intends to do that. But, by bringing people together you are risking their health, you are risking your health, you are risking total strangers' health. This is just a huge, huge mistake."

While religious entities are exempt from the Stay At Home and Mass Gatherings Orders, for the welfare of your parishioners, their families and others, we are asking you to consider alternative methods of celebration for services using technology rather than traditional in-person gatherings.

There are a variety of options available to connect with your church families without gathering:

- Facebook Live – allows followers to watch services and join in with comments and prayers.
- Host a conference call with members if capacity allows.
- Videos can be shared on YouTube Live or posted to a YouTube channel with a link for texts.
- Host an online worship service through Zoom. (Reduced pricing may be available for registered non-profit organizations.
- If technology to stream your service is a barrier, post a transcript of the service on your website or Facebook page.

If you make the decision to hold in-person services or parking lot services, make certain you are taking the necessary precautions to protect all who participate:

- Maintain social distancing of 6 ft. between each person/car
- Encourage individuals to wear cloth masks
- Refrain from sharing any common items
- Provide soap and water or hand sanitizer
- Ramp up environmental cleaning before and after services especially to high touch surfaces.
- Anyone who is sick should stay home and be encouraged to watch remotely.

The Ohio Department of Health provides a COVID-19 Checklist for Faith-Based and Community Organizations at: <https://bit.ly/2JTzMFs>

Your parishioners will be turning to you for guidance. We ask that you please consider the health and well-being of all when making decisions on services for this weekend and the weeks to follow.

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