

To: The Mount Oak Fellowship Family

Re: The State of Emergency in Maryland

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ.

As almost all of you must assuredly know by now, due to the Coronavirus or COVID-19, Governor Hogan has declared a state of emergency in the state of Maryland and taken the unusual step of cancelling school from March 16th – March 27th as well as many other public events. In response to the governor's actions, Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling has strongly requested that all United Methodist Churches in Maryland and Washington D.C. not hold worship services through March 29th.

Ultimately the decision of whether or not to hold worship services in the United Methodist Church resides with the senior pastor. After much thought, prayer and conversation I have decided to honor the leadership of Gov. Hogan and the request of our bishop.

RATIONALE

I have met Christians who attend other churches and feel that because they have faith they do not need to pay attention to the concerns that are being raised by "the world". I can sympathize with their perspective, but in this case I believe they are wrong for at least two reasons.

First, Biblically speaking Christians are not exempt from tragedy and disaster. If anyone ever had faith in Jesus Christ it was Paul and the early apostles but in Acts 11:27-28 a prophet named Agabus foretold a famine that was to come over all the known world. The response of the apostles was not to deny that the famine would happen but to make provisions for it.

Second, we are genuinely concerned about everyone's health, but we are also aware that many of you have great faith and absolutely want to be in church. My mother-in-law recently said to me that she has reached an age where if she gets sick in church and dies from a disease and then goes to heaven that is OK (or better than OK). I strongly resonate with her feelings. This world is not our home.

That said, honoring the governor's state of emergency is not a matter of being afraid to die. To be honest I greatly desire to worship with everyone in the midst of the fear that is gripping our nation. The issue, however, goes beyond our own health and faith. Our state and national leaders reasonably believe that by limiting social interaction in larger groups we can slow down the spread of COVID-19 and this will allow our medical facilities to save more lives.

WHAT WILL WE DO IN THE MEANTIME?

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:16 that we should "redeem the time because the days are evil." With those still timely words in mind, the leadership of Mount Oak has the following goals for the weeks in which our church is not functioning as usual.

1. We are purchasing equipment to record and livestream our services. Our goal is that our pastors and worship team will be able to livestream a service this Sunday at 10 am and that you will be able to watch a recorded version at 11 am (for this week, 11 am is the safer bet).
2. Beginning on Monday members of Mount Oak and I will be recording daily devotions to be shared online and through email. (If you are interested in writing and recording a devotion please contact me at pastorbob@mtoak.org or 301-249-220 or 410-317-5177)
3. Members of Mount Oak's staff are creating a temporary pastoral care team which has as its goal making weekly contact with all members and regular attenders AND identifying anyone who is in particular need of help. If you are interested in serving on this team please contact Molly Holloway at secretary@mtoak.org.
4. The staff are planning to work their regular schedules.
5. Finally, our facilities manager Kevin Kauffman is trying to create a team for applying disinfectant for the days when the state of emergency is lifted. If you have any time available, please contact Kevin at kevin@mtoak.org.

In closing, these days are not the days any of us would choose, but they are the days we have been given. Let us make the most of them by accepting the rest that God might give, spending time with family, working productively as we are able, and letting the world know that we have a hope in Jesus Christ that cannot be destroyed.

Pastor Barnes

One final thing: We want to encourage all of our members who are not being financially crippled by the state of emergency to continue supporting us financially. Even though we are in many ways shut down we still have bills to pay. During this usual time you may support the church by mailing checks to:

Mount Oak Fellowship of the UMC
14110 Mount Oak Road
Mitchellville, MD 20721

or by giving online through our website (<https://www.mtoak.org/give/>), through your Realm account or the Connect app, or by scanning this QR code:

