March 17, 2020

Dear Church Community,

Lewis and Clark Public Health is working overtime to curb the spread of COVID-19 in our community. At this time, guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, and Lewis and Clark Public Health is to avoid group gatherings of more than 10 people and practice social distancing, which is defined as avoiding mass gatherings and keeping at least 6 feet between individuals. These aggressive efforts will help to limit the spread of this potentially fatal respiratory disease.

Because of these national and state guidelines, Lewis and Clark Public Health recommends that churches consider closing public gatherings and using virtual methods to stay connected to your congregations. If your church decides to stay open, we expect you to follow the guidance below. These guidelines are subject to change based on the COVID-19 status in our community, state, and nation.

- Screen for illness and promptly send home anyone with COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), even if they are mild.
- Allow no more than 10 people total to gather in the same room or other confined space.
- Practice social distancing. Maintain a distance of 6 feet between everyone on the premises. This may mean temporarily discontinuing practices that involve touching, like “passing the peace.”
- Sanitize multiple times a day, especially hard surfaces that many hands touch.
- Ensure everyone uses good hand hygiene before and after services. They should wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol.

Our mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis and Clark County residents
• Anyone over age 65 is considered at higher risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19. This population should not be attending service or working with the public at this time.

• If you offer communion, discontinue temporarily the use of a shared communion cup.

The situation is changing rapidly, and these directions are subject to change. We appreciate your partnership in keeping our community safe and healthy from this novel coronavirus.

Please refer to the CDC website for more information about what faith communities can do:

Sincerely,

Drenda Niemann, MPA, CPH
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