

Pastors and Elders of John Knox Presbytery, there is no doubt that we have been living through one of the most challenging times in our lives due to the onset of COVID-19. Many of you have been involved in difficult discussions and decisions about in person vs virtual worship, as well as other church programming. As of mid-September, a little less than half of our congregations are participating in in person worship. This is almost exclusively in our rural communities and equally exclusively worshipping out of doors. All indications are that these congregations have been in areas where infection rates are quite low, and they have been following suggested protocols very closely. THANK YOU for your diligence and care in making tough decisions and making strong guidelines for the health and safety of your people.

To paraphrase Heraclitus: “No one steps into the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and they are not the same person.” That is a very philosophical way of saying things are always changing. No circumstance has demonstrated that idea more than the daily changes we see in health department numbers concerning COVID-19 infection rates. The congregations which have resumed in person worship did so with the knowledge that those rates were “Low Risk” in their region. But in recent weeks a large portion of John Knox Presbytery throughout Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota have seen a surge in cases which puts them in the “High Risk” category.

While I commend all our leaders for their faithful decision making and diligent safeguards. I urge you to be mindful that ours is an everchanging situation. I urge our sessions and pastors to:

- continue monitoring the health of your community and the possible surge that could infect your congregation.
- be vigilant in keeping up those safeguards of masking, cleaning, and keeping singing and hand shaking to a minimum.
- And finally, remain precise in keeping good attendance records in case you are asked for help in contact tracing.

You have made tough decisions, but once made it is not over. Decisions need to be reassessed and sometimes reconsidered in light of new developments. No one wants to think of stepping back into a lockdown type situation, but neither do we want to see any of our loved ones get sick or die from a preventable disease. Each of you has been called by God to be in your position at this time, and we can hold firm to the promise of Christ, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.”

May God bless us in this time as God has blessed us throughout all the generations.

Chaz Ruark
Executive Presbyter