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IMPLICATIONS OF THE WISCONSIN SUPREME COURT ACTION FOR THE WISCONSIN CONGREGATIONS OF JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERY

On Wednesday, May 13th the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned Governor Evers' "Safer at Home" order which set out a plan for returning to traditional patterns for public gatherings. Because COVID-19 is still a threat to the health of persons who don't practice protective measures such as social distancing, this action has created confusion and debate.

In April John Knox Presbytery issued a statement which included the Wisconsin Council of Churches document "[Returning to Church](#)." That plan offered advice which mirrored a graduated process outlined in the "[Badger Bounce Back Plan](#)."

Despite the Court action which immediately opens up all businesses and institutions we urge Sessions to use caution and practice care when making decisions about in-person worship. Also, please know that at the time of this writing a handful of counties have extended the safer at home order while they make a local plan, so please check your local situation. To that end we want to affirm some important points.

We affirm that:

- everyone deeply desires to return to our traditional worship patterns
- everyone is concerned about our neighbors who are suffering economic hardship during this time, especially those who can least afford to miss work.

We also affirm that:

- the largest group of our membership is composed of persons considered at risk because of their age
- many other members are at risk because of other conditions such as heart issues, asthma, etc.
- some of our practices actually increase unsafe actions, singing, passing the peace, passing an offering plate, sharing communion, etc.
- the Church is not a building but a community. We do not NEED a building to celebrate our community
- the Church is called to follow two commands Love God, and love neighbors as ourselves.

We do not wish to engage in a partisan political debate. However, we urge our Sessions to make decisions which reflect that love for neighbors. An immediate and unlimited return to traditional worship may actually endanger those people we love so dearly. We also want to congratulate our churches for their adaptation to this situation such as online presence, the worship that lifts many in their time of isolation. Many pastors report that they are actually reaching more people online than they do with in person worship. Even as we move toward to returning to traditional worship we urge you to keep providing an accommodation to those who continue to be at risk, including an online presence for those who will be reluctant to gather in large groups until a vaccine makes such gatherings safer.





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