

Good morning!

Yesterday, Governor Reynolds outlined plans for slowly beginning to reopen the state. 77 of 99 counties were identified that could reopen under specific restrictions and guidelines. If you want to read the entire proclamation, you can access it here: <https://governor.iowa.gov/press-release/gov-reynolds-signs-new-proclamation-continuing-the-state-public-health-emergency-0>

Cedar county is one of those 77 counties. The proclamation does give religious institutions the option to gather again in groups exceeding 10 people given *“a church, synagogue, or other host of a spiritual or religious gathering shall implement reasonable measures under the circumstances of each gathering to ensure social distancing of employees, volunteers, and other participants, increased hygiene practices, and other public health measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 consistent with guidance issued by the Iowa Department of Public Health.”* (Section 6, A.)

Further, the proclamation recommends individuals 65 and over or having preexisting health conditions *“continue to limit their activities outside of their home, including their visits to businesses and other establishments and their participation in gatherings of any size and any purpose.”*

The Executive Committee convened last evening to discuss this proclamation and our next course of action. First off, I want to commend the work of these leaders, along with that of the entire Council in making decisions no one could ever have imagined would need to be made. I stand behind each of those decisions and believe they were the correct ones for our community. We have always done our utmost best to err on the side of caution and seek the safety of staff, parishioners and all people who utilize our building.

With that said and after careful deliberation, *we were unanimous in concluding at this time we will continue as is through May 15th*. All activities will continue to be suspended and the building closed, with the exception of limited hours. The council will meet via Zoom on May 11th and determine future plans at that time.

Many factors went into this decision; but one in particular is West Branch’s location to both Johnson and Muscatine counties in particular, both of which are in the 22 that are required to adhere to prior recommendations through May 15th.

When we do begin to resume normal activities, plans on how to do so will need to carefully and deliberately thought out and implemented. The Office of the Bishop of Southeastern Iowa Synod advised yesterday Bishop Burk will provide suggestions to congregations on when and how to do this next week.

We appreciate your continued patience, support and faithfulness to the work we do together in the name of Christ. May the peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comfort and sustain us each and every day!

Pastor Chad