

Dear Members of our Faith Communities and Citizens of the State of Indiana:

In light of Governor Holcomb's recently announced plan (May 1, 2020) to start reopening the State, and in affirmation of statements issued by other faith communities, we offer the following Pastoral Response:

As people of faith, we believe in the common good, strive to serve, and pray for one another. We are leaders of various religious communities, living in extraordinary times, acknowledging our responsibility to be faithful, forward-thinking, and safety-conscious.

We believe in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, that it is an act of faith is to remain physically apart. Large in-person gatherings pose too great a risk to the common good, and our faith traditions can, and should, withstand this disruption to our practices.

Therefore, out of these convictions, and in response to our governor's reopening plan:

We encourage all congregations, their leaders, and their members to make safety and well-being of each other, those at particular risk, and those in their broader community, their greatest priority.

We urge congregations to refrain from in-person religious gatherings, including worship. Decisions to return to in-person gatherings should be based on science, the best practices recommended by public health officials, and in consultation with the leaders of our faith communities.

We affirm the Governor's statement that, "We need you to keep your congregations safe," and his preference that religious communities "continue to hold virtual... services."

We encourage continued creativity in religious expression, and we join together to lament, to grieve, and to honor the ways in which we are all changed by this crisis.

We affirm the ways in which faith communities are supporting essential workers, those most at risk, and their constituents.

We are inspired by the many ways faith communities have expressed hope, shared resources, and cared for the vulnerable and those facing financial hardships.

We trust that persons of faith will hold fast to the common good, keep up the work, and prayerfully walk alongside one another during times of trial and times of joy.

We make these statements as an act of faith, trusting that we need not gather to be together, believing we will be together again, and fully convicted in keeping one another safe from harm.

Until we meet again...

May it be so.

Carmel Interfaith Alliance Executive Board

President, Rabbi Dennis Sasso

Vice President, Lori Bievenour

Secretary/Treasurer, Shelly Wood

Interim Executive Director, Jerry Zehr