



Statement from Presiding Bishop, General Board and COVID-19 Advisory Commission

May 23, 2020

Beloved Brethren:

Greetings in the matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The past few months have been a season of great difficulty for our nation and our world. The United States has endured several viral pandemics in the previous 100 years. Still, there has never been a time when a viral illness has wrought such a profoundly negative impact on our communities as COVID-19, the Coronavirus.

The Church of God in Christ family has been no exception. Bishops, Superintendents, Pastors, and lay members have succumbed to this disease, leaving their families and churches devastated by their untimely passing.

As the Presiding Bishop, I am joined by the General Board, as well as the physicians and scientists who comprise the COGIC COVID-19 Advisory Commission in providing the recommendation contained in this letter. We can fully assure you of the appropriateness of the current directives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). They admonish us to stay home and to wear appropriate face coverings and engage in social distancing if we absolutely must go out.

The directives of the CDC and NIAID have proven to diminish the impact of the disease and prevent its further spread and loss of life. For this reason, state and local governments have concurred and issued mandatory stay-at-home orders and prohibition of gatherings. These directives included church services. Several states have decided to relax restrictions and permit regular activities in defiance of these recommendations. These premature re-openings will once again put tens of thousands of our COGIC saints in harm's way.

We urge you, our pastors, to adhere to the recommendations of the CDC and NIAID and to refrain from prematurely opening your churches and congregating in your buildings before we have credible and substantiated evidence that it is safe to do so. In addition, we urge you to establish a protocol to safely reopen your church to prevent any risk to the health and safety of our members and communities at large *before* you reopen your churches.

The nation's top scientific and medical experts, in addition to religious and community leaders, have been very transparent in communicating America's need for people to refrain from gathering in large numbers. They have recommended social isolation and masking. To their credit, the experts have admitted that the health disparity in our country has resulted in significantly more deaths in people of color from the Coronavirus than deaths of whites.

Centuries of social and economic inequality most likely have caused Black Americans to suffer additional consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, increasing the vulnerability of our COGIC members and worshipers. If we are to return to a semblance of the glorious church that we love, we must accept - follow - the recommendation of the experts and continue to engage in social distancing, isolation, and masking.

The CDC and the NIAID have developed mathematical models to monitor the number of newly confirmed cases and deaths resulting from the virus. They have used these models to track the pattern of sickness and death. The data will help them determine when containment has been achieved and when it is safe to resume public gatherings, including church services and other religious activities.

To date, there is a consensus between these two organizations that containment has not been achieved in the United States. The number of new cases and deaths continues to increase. Based on the data available to them, the CDC and NIAID recommend that the present precautionary measures remain in place. We agree and caution pastors to delay re-opening churches at least through the end of June, if not later. Even when regular activity is allowed to resume, it must be done cautiously and methodically in phases.

Again, we implore you, our pastors, to adhere to the recommendations of the CDC and NIAID. Negative consequences, including possibly more deaths could occur as a result of unadvised and premature resumption of church services and other religious gatherings that defy the current public health recommendations.

Stated plainly, we firmly believe that even though stay-at-home orders are being lifted, the COGIC churches should not be among the first churches to reopen. The reopening of our COGIC churches should not begin at the present time and should only be done when it is deemed safe to do so. COGIC pastors and members should follow evidence based guidelines from bodies such as the CDC, NIAID, state and local departments of health, and the COVID-19 Advisory panel of the COGIC and wait until it is *safe* to hold services.

For those pastors who must open their doors, we encourage you to follow guidelines issued by the CDC which are accessible in this link <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html>

BISHOP CHARLES EDWARD BLAKE, SR.
Presiding Bishop & Chief Apostle
Seventh In Succession
Los Angeles, California

BISHOP JERRY WAYNE MACKLIN
Interim 1st Assistant Presiding Bishop
Prelate, NorCal Metropolitan
Hayward, California

BISHOP SEDGWICK DANIELS
Interim 2nd Assistant Presiding Bishop
Prelate, Wisconsin Southern First
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

BISHOP LAWRENCE WOOTEN, SR.
Assistant Secretary to the General Board
Prelate, Eastern Missouri Western Illinois
St. Louis, Missouri

BISHOP GEORGE DALLAS MCKINNEY
Prelate, California Southern Second
San Diego, California

BISHOP JOHN DREW SHEARD
Prelate, Michigan North Central
Detroit, Michigan

BISHOP BRANDON PORTER
Prelate, Tennessee Central
Memphis, Tennessee

BISHOP TED THOMAS, SR.
Prelate, Virginia First
Portsmouth, Virginia

BISHOP DARRELL HINES
Prelate, Illinois Midwest
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

BISHOP MATTHEW WILLIAMS
Prelate, Florida Southwestern
Tampa, Florida