



Dear Brother Pastors and/or Other Congregation Leaders,

I continue to pray that you, your families, and church communities are living with the confidence and joy of knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Fear is contagious, but so are faith, hope, and love ... and we, as God's children living under the blood-stained cross and in view of the open, victory-proclaiming Easter tomb of Jesus, have every reason to have faith, be filled with hope, and demonstrate love to all.

We're living in unprecedented times and your Michigan District Staff is well aware of the unique decisions you must make for your specific ministry. Congregations, schools, and early childhood centers of the Michigan District face the challenge of navigating the rapid changes brought about by the COVID-19 virus while maintaining the tension between being

1. a visible expression of the Body of Christ, and
2. an organization with processes, policies, and resources that must be managed.

No one knows your congregation, school, preschool, or early childhood ministries—and the particular context of these ministries—better than you. Although we have received many specific requests for exactly what serious decisions should be made for your ministry context, we offer the following principles instead. These principles are designed to guide ministry leaders as they seek to manage the organizational and business side of their churches, schools, and ministries in a way that keeps its public witness vibrant and true to our Lord Jesus, His life of love, and the Holy Scriptures.

Friends, I must also strongly encourage you to make these decisions sooner rather than later. Lenders will start taking applications on Friday, April 3, 2020 for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) discussed below. We encourage you not to delay in making a decision on utilizing this act and making an application as some have shared concerns regarding applications received after the cap of funding has been reached.

Ministry Staffing Principles

- The ministry's financial health is a witness to the community.
- When a ministry is unable to meet its financial obligations, it creates hardship for others and gives reason for others to be critical of Jesus. In contrast, when the ministry meets its obligations, especially in times of adversity, it is a witness of God's care and compassion.
- The ministry's care for its workers is a witness to the community and to the Church at large.
- Servants in the church make sacrifices to be involved in ministry. Those sacrifices include a reduced salary scale when compared to similar positions in the secular world and usually the loss of government protections during times of unemployment. Ministries give a positive witness to their communities by financially supporting their workers, particularly in times of hardship.

However, there is, at present, some significant assistance from the federal government through the CARES Act that is available to faith-based 501(c)(3) organizations like churches and non-public schools.

The **Paycheck Protection Program** will provide financial relief for many of our

congregations and ministries that are keeping workers employed during this period.

Expanded Unemployment provisions are *expected* to also be available to our church workers that normally are exempt as employees of a church. We are waiting implementation of these provisions by the State of Michigan and further clarification from the Federal government, if necessary, on this matter.

Congregations will want to understand at least the opportunities specifically mentioned above (keeping staff employed with assistance of the PPP or temporarily laying off staff which we anticipate will be eligible for certain unemployment benefits) as they make staffing decisions.

Information on these and other aspects of the CARES Act, including a link to detailed information from Concordia Plan Services, can be found along with other pandemic resources on our website [here](#).

- The ministry leaders should have a clearly defined *death line*--the point at which the ministry has no humanly possible means of recovery. It is the point in the ministry when all assets have been liquidated except for those which are essential for the continuation as a ministry.
- Principles for making decisions and a financial strategy for the ministry should be developed well in advance of the *death line*. The financial strategy should include a realistic plan to increase income and a systematic process for reducing debt. The financial strategy should be **priority driven**, rather than position or personality driven:
 1. The top priority should be the core ministries identified by Scripture,
 2. then the staff needed to meet the core ministries' requirements,
 3. then building needs for core ministries,
 4. then support staff, and
 5. then the desirable but not essential ministry activities.
- Care for viability of the ministry and compassion for the worker should be used in determining priorities and strategies before any reduction in expenses.
- It is essential that workers are treated equally in regard to reductions in pay to maintain a healthy environment of teamwork. However, **the principle of equity does not negate the principle of priority** in reductions in the total number of workers in the total ministry.

In general, when making decisions, think about advancing the **Kingdom of God** ... and not only about the survival of the ministry of your local congregation or ministry. Such a mindset will inform and guide your decisions with biblical mandates, not only business principles.

Conclusion

In closing, I would ask that all of us read and remember the Holy Spirit-inspired words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:1–13 and then, by Holy Spirit-given, cultivated, maturing, emboldened faith, so believe and act:

*“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. **But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.**”*

*“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that***

though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

"And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."

"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.'"

God is surely telling us **how** we can weather this crisis. These words of our Lord Jesus Christ in His first recorded sermon (Matthew 5–7) found in Matthew 6:25–34, are also powerful, assuring, encouraging, and directive:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Friends, God's got this! Since He promises to work all things together for good for His children, let us find the good during this pandemic ... reading the living Word of God, humbly worshiping and praying before the Lord, listening to and following (obeying) the voice of our Good Shepherd. *"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:31–32).

Amen!

God bless you all!

With sincere gratitude to be in ministry with you at this time,

Rev. Dr. David P. E. Maier
President, The Michigan District
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PS. Fear is contagious. So is Faith, Hope, and Love!



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