

**RESPONSE BY THE DIOCESAN BISHOP OF THE GEORGIA  
STATE COUNCIL TO GOVERNOR BRIAN KEMP'S  
APRIL 20, 2020  
COVID-19 PRESS CONFERENCE**

Dear Pastors:

On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Governor Brian Kemp of Georgia announced that certain businesses and places of worship were allowed to reopen in the coming days following the guidelines and practices of social distancing. As your Diocesan, my priority is to provide guidance that ensures the care and safety of the entire Georgia State Council constituency, while working collaboratively with our government and public health officials on a responsible, comprehensive plan to reopen our churches at the appropriate time. Therefore, I recommend that Georgia State Council churches not gather physically for on-site worship or other programming.

As you are well aware, Blacks in about every state with racial data available have higher contraction rates and higher death rates of COVID-19. In Michigan, Blacks make up 15% of the state's population but represent 35% of people diagnosed with COVID-19. This means that Blacks in Michigan are 133% more likely to contract the novel coronavirus relative to their percentage of the state.

In Illinois, Blacks represent about 16% of the state but 30% of people diagnosed with COVID-19. In Chicago, Blacks represent 70% of people who have died from coronavirus. North Carolina, South Carolina, and New York show the same pattern with slightly smaller gaps.

In Louisiana, Blacks represent about one-third of the state's population but 70% of COVID-19 deaths. Most of these deaths are centered in the New Orleans area.

In Georgia, Blacks represent about 32% of the state's population. About 8.5% of Black people have coronavirus.

During a White House coronavirus task force briefing, Dr. Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, stated, "Health disparities have always existed for the African American community....[coronavirus is] shining a bright light on how unacceptable that is because, yet again, when you have a situation like the coronavirus, they are suffering disproportionately. We will get over coronavirus, but there will still be health disparities which we really do need to address in the African American community."

Via a telephone conference call on Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> with the Georgia State Council Bishops and Suffragan Bishops, Suffragan Bishop George Floyd informed us about an incident which happened in Long County, Georgia. According to the health district, a Long County resident tested positive for the novel coronavirus yet attended church-related gatherings while symptomatic. The resident is currently hospitalized. The health district is alerting anyone who attended the following gatherings may have been exposed to the virus and should immediately self- quarantine.

- April 5 and 8: Church services at Living Waters Ministries on 862 South Coastal Highway in Midway, GA.
- April 9: A visitation and funeral at the Royal Funeral Home at 247 West Pine Street in Jesup, GA.
- April 9: A post-funeral gathering in a private home in Midway, GA.

The director of Royal Funeral Home said a viewing for family was scheduled but got out-of-hand when more people started showing up. Law enforcement was called to get the people out, and they did comply.

I am requesting that you please continue worshipping, meeting, and studying God's Word virtually via available conference calls and livestreaming technologies until your respective churches can SAFELY reunite in the same space. When that time arrives, I recommend you implement a measured, methodical plan. Until then, please continue to shelter-in-place and remain prayerful. I encourage you to take every precaution necessary to protect yourselves, your families, families of the church, guests, and the community at large.

Very respectfully,

Bishop J.D. Guthrie

Diocesan, Georgia State Council

30<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District of the

Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc.