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Wear A Mask, Keep Your Neighbors Safe

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How did we get to the point where asking someone to wear a mask is a political issue?

And yet, somehow, inexplicably, that's exactly where we stand.

At the time of this writing, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Arkansas stands at just over 20,000, with nearly 6,000 active cases in the state. That includes about 300

hospitalizations, 63 persons on a ventilator, and 265 Arkansans — people of all races, religions, genders, and ages — who have died from this terrible, unseen enemy.

And compared to other states in the South — like Texas, Florida, and Georgia, where cases have exceeded or are nearing the 100,000 case mark — those are good numbers!

That also doesn't even begin to touch on the total cases in the United States — more than 2.5 million — or the incalculable devastation of the lives we've lost in six short months: nearly 126,000.

And yet, we still have people who think this virus is a hoax. Or it's not as deadly as other viruses. Or that it's some sort of deadly game of chess, where the economy is the king and me, you, and everyone we know are pawns that can easily be tossed aside for the "greater good."

We cannot continue to act like this virus is over and that it's time to return to the way things were. Back to our normal lives, pre-COVID.

I read a chilling article the other day citing the diminishing number of COVID cases in older adults, and the rapidly rising number of cases from people in the 24 – 44 age group.

That's me. Those are my friends. Those are people who are a little older and a little younger than me. We are now the leading cause of coronavirus cases in the U.S., and because of the thousands of people who have the coronavirus but are asymptomatic, we don't even know we have it.

I don't want to be the reason that someone's mother, father, grandparent, or sibling dies from coronavirus. I can't have that on my conscience. Who would ever want to live with the knowledge that something you did had caused pain and unimaginable loss in another's life?

We have been told by health experts, scientists and many of our leaders that aside from washing your hands, and staying six feet apart from others, wearing a face-covering is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of COVID-19.

We have to follow the rules in order to make any progress in this fight.

You've heard this quote from John Wesley before, and it's applicable to our current crisis now more than ever: "Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God."

We are failing at even the most basic understanding of Wesley's rules: do no harm.

We have to start thinking of wearing a mask and stopping the spread of the virus as a matter of extending Christian love to others rather than something we throw a fit about in a grocery store checkout lane.

I am so very grateful that we have a leader like Bishop Mueller in Arkansas right now. The Bishop has been a constant source of fact-based information and smart guidance for our churches as we all have learned to navigate doing church in a brand new way.

Our Conference has put out a steady stream of COVID-19 guidance since this pandemic began, and for the many churches that have chosen to follow the guidance, it has kept us safe while other churches and denominations have, unfortunately, faced outbreaks in their places of worship.

And I can't thank the Methodist Foundation for Arkansas enough for the generous donation of PPE supplies, including sanitizer and disinfectant, for every United Methodist Church in Arkansas. One of the biggest barriers people face when trying to protect themselves from coronavirus infections is access to basic supplies, like masks, gloves, and sanitizer. They have made it possible for all of our Methodist churches to open safely.

We are not done fighting this war yet. And don't make a mistake; this pandemic is a war and not just a battle. We will be fighting this virus for many more months to come.

The least you can do right now is wash your hands, keep your distance, and for goodness' sake, wear a mask and keep your neighbors safe!

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