

Suggested “Season for Gathering” Talking Points

You can use the talking points below to share important information about slowing the spread of COVID-19 in your community, especially during this season where many people gather to celebrate holidays or honor traditions with family and friends. You can use these points when speaking to your congregation during this season, to share on your website, and more.

- State health officials reached out to me and other leaders in our community to let us know we are seeing an increase in the percent of positive tests and hospitalizations from COVID-19 as the virus continues to spread throughout our state. We must all do our part to stop the spread of this virus.
- Together, we will beat this virus. I have faith that we will – and faith is good. A person of faith is also a person of action who is dedicated to the good work that we all must do. The good work of fighting this virus; the good work of protecting our neighbors and our loved ones; the good work that our faith calls us to do is before us now in our season of gathering.
- Late-fall and early winter is a time of gathering. It is a time when we come together to give thanks, to sit and reminisce over the good times and the tough times the year has brought, to honor our faith and family traditions, to celebrate the holidays and usher in a new year.... We cherish this time with family and friends as we gather in our places of worship and around our family tables.
- But this is no typical year and it is not a typical season of gathering. This virus is impacting every town – big and small – across North Carolina. And this year, the traditions and gatherings that we hold dear provide an opportunity for the virus to spread. We know that gatherings can spread the virus rapidly. I’m sure you’ve heard of the many positive cases that have come from someone attending a small gatherings with family and friends, only to later find out that someone unknowingly had COVID-19.
- Our families are facing difficult decisions about whether or not we can come together to celebrate this year. During this season for gathering, it is important to remember that if you gather with anyone who does not live in your home, you are at risk and they are too. When we are with people we know, we often let our guard down, but knowing someone doesn’t stop the virus from spreading. And this isn’t about trust because far too often family and friends may have the virus and not even know it yet, resulting in them unintentionally spreading the virus among those they love. But there are steps we can take to keep our loved ones safe.
- During this season of gathering and giving, it’s important that we give each other the most important gift we can -- health and well-being. I want to share a few things we can do to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our community during this season of gathering:

- **Get Behind the Mask.** It doesn't matter who you know, or how well you know them, wearing a mask is the easiest way to protect our family, our friends, and our neighbors. If you are around anyone who does not live in your home, wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash your hands often.
 - *Suggestion: Let folks know why you wear a mask. E.g., "For me, wearing a mask is about respect. I don't know all of the details of your family health and you don't know mine, and none of us know for sure if we are carrying the virus, so when I put on the mask it is my way of saying I respect and care about the people around me and their families."*
- **Gather Virtually.** It is best to meet virtually during this season of gathering. Host or attend a virtual family event, bring our faith community together virtually as we continue cherished traditions, and use video technology to share important moments with family and friends, near and far.
- **Gather More Safely.** Some people want and need to be together during this time of year. We can still celebrate important moments and honor sacred traditions during this time of year, but we have to be careful. If you gather in-person with family and friends, please help protect your loved ones by doing the following:
 - To keep everyone as safe as possible, keep it small. No gathering should be larger than 10 people indoors . Remember, the virus can be spread in smaller gatherings.
 - Gather outside if you can, or open windows to increase ventilation. Arrange space and seating so everyone can maintain social distancing during the gathering, especially if they will be eating or drinking, and plan activities where social distancing can be maintained.
 - Practice the 3Ws – wear a face mask, wait six feet part, and wash your hands.
 - Do not host or attend a gathering if you're sick, have been diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, are waiting on COVID-19 test results, or have been told to isolate or quarantine by a health care professional or the health department.
 - Encourage your guests to avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the event.
 - Avoid close contact through handshaking or hugs. Instead, wave or verbally greet each other.
 - Limit the number of people handling or serving food. If serving food, have one person serve all food so that multiple people are not handling serving utensils. Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks. Use disposable utensils and dishes.
 - Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as door handles, sink handles, and bathroom surfaces.
- I know this is a cherished time of the year when we make memories and spend time with our loved ones. By working together, we can gather more safely to spread love, joy, and good cheer,

without spreading the virus. The simplest thing each of us can do is wear a mask and practice social distancing when we are around people who don't live in our home.