



SECOND EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

James Levert Davis
Servant Bishop

MEMORANDUM

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DATE: October 1, 2020

TO: Second Episcopal District Pastor, Clergy, and Congregation

FROM: James Levert Davis and The Council of Presiding Elders

SUBJECT: **"RE-ENTERING OUR CHURCHES - Call for Unification and Collaboration"**

Let us begin this message of concern with the end in mind. We praise God for all of our SED Pastors/Clergy and Congregations. You have demonstrated creativity and commitment to continue providing an array of spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social service opportunities for church and community. Even though the ways many of you worked have been upended, we are grateful for all you have done, are doing, and will do in these unprecedented times.

Further, we ask that you pray, take time, and let your godly judgment inform your decisions. We are passionately pleading. Do not rush to judgment; and under no circumstances are we encouraging your opening at this time. As God has provided in the past, He will continue to pour out His blessings upon those who trust Him and walk in faith. As the song says, He didn't bring us this far to leave us.

Additionally, we appreciate, respect, and understand your desire to return to the church the building, (*we all have that desire to participate in the sweet fellowship*); however, we want to be sure that the safety, input, and preparation are factored into your decisions.

Please understand that as the leadership of the District, we cannot control your decisions to open, but as we look at the profiles around what is happening in Black/African American and Latino communities, we would caution that your decisions not necessarily follow the patterns of opening our churches as some of the states have opened. According to the CDC, compared to Whites, African Americans are 2.6x higher in cases, 4.6x higher in hospitalizations, and 2.1x higher in deaths due to COVID-19. Bringing to light the adage that when America catches

a cold, Black people catch pneumonia. We are seeing the consequences as numbers rise.

Another factor to consider is, race and ethnicity are risk markers for other underlying conditions that impact health — including socioeconomic status, access to health care, and increased exposure to the virus due to occupation (*e.g., frontline, essential, and critical infrastructure workers*). Many Blacks and Latinos are those who are employed in these occupations (*CDC, September 15, 2020*). Again, we say, we are appealing to your spirituality, morality, and intellect. Our decisions need to be made in the context of our community.

We ask that you utilize the list below as you move forward on this critical issue:

- Have you addressed and adhered to all items on the Re-entry Plan?
- Have you consulted with your attorney and insurance company to be informed on legal ramifications should the church encounter legal judgment?
- Have you exercised power “*with*” rather than power “*over*” the pastor and congregation? Is the decision arbitrary or has it been reached in unity and collaboration with pastor and congregation?
- Do you see yourselves as a cohesive group where each person’s opinion is valued? Do you feel that you can openly and honestly express your desires without consequences?
- Is there a plan developed by which you will provide spiritual and social service opportunities (*virtual, face-to-face, hybrid, etc.*) for the entire congregation and community? In a world that seems to increasingly need to witness the impact that loving and respecting one another can have on society, the church is exactly the place where this should be demonstrated.

It is clear that as we continue to coexist with the coronavirus pandemic, there is a need to continue to adjust our approaches as the “*new normal*” requires. The health, safety, and well-being of all (*from infants to seniors*) for whom we have responsibility are **our priority**.

We pray God’s blessings upon each of you as we work together to bring God’s Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

In the Spirit of the #4REAL Church-Rising to the Challenge!