

## **In-Person Worship Suspended**

On Thursday evening, the Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish councils made the decision to suspend in-person worship through Labor Day. Though we have carefully followed our protocol, which does outline the safest practices, it is the external factors that motivated the decision to move on the side of caution.

There were three key data points that brought the decision about:

- The spike in cases in Mendota has caused the city to ask businesses to cut back to phase 3 practices (as outlined in the Restore Illinois Plan)
- Mendota schools choosing to open only on-line until after Labor Day when they will reevaluate (if schools aren't comfortable meeting in person, why should we?)
- In addition, there have been seven confirmed cases in the Paw Paw zip code when previously there weren't any.

So, to assure the safety of our members, and to make sure HOILP is not party to carrying the virus toward Lee and Shabbona, the councils have decided to be extra cautious and took the undesired but necessary action of suspending our in-person worship again.

"Don't get me wrong," said one council member, "I really want to come back to worship in the church. But this disease is deadly. I don't want anybody to die. We can worship at home with our videos in order to be safe."

Pastor Jeff and the many volunteers will continue to produce the worship videos. We will continue to work our ministries such as Bountiful Garden, NICE support and volunteering, WELCA school supply collection (which is just about complete) and so on. "We need to remember that church is not closed," said Pastor Jeff. "For safety purposes we have suspended our in-person worship services, but the business of following Jesus still goes forth. We will still proclaim the gospel, feed the hungry, comfort the grieving, and fight for justice."

The councils are planning to meet jointly the week after Labor Day and will evaluate the situation then. This is specific response to the context in northern LaSalle and southern Lee Counties. When the situation changes, because we already have used it, we have practices and procedures in place to safely gather again. In the meantime, we worship over the airwaves and thank God daily for our modern technology that allows us to keep in touch with one another so easily.