FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 8, 2020

WISCONSIN FAITH LEADERS RESPOND TO COVID-19 CLOSURES

As faith leaders in Wisconsin, we have chosen to demonstrate our love of neighbors by closing our doors during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, our moratorium on all public worship and meetings was put in place even before the State order because we believed this was the best way to protect the greatest number of people and slow the spread of this virus. The action of Governor Evers helps people to understand the severity of this moratorium. Is it a sacrifice? Yes. People of faith understand sacrifice and what it requires to give oneself in love for others.

Accordingly, we are troubled by suggestions of government leaders that the Safer At Home order be lifted on the occasion of upcoming holy days. The collective moratorium is a wise decision that protects both people in the community and our faith organizations. To pull back from that decision – on a case-by-case, congregation-by-congregation, temple-by-temple, mosque-by-mosque, synagogue-by-synagogue basis – puts an undue burden on faith leaders at a time when their energies are best turned elsewhere. Moreover, those most likely to attend such services are older persons who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the virus.

For our faith groups, this time has been a time of great creativity. Clergy are gathering their people for worship and study through Zoom, YouTube, and Facebook Live throughout the week. Faith organizations are teaming together to offer joint services. Clergy and lay leaders are also reaching out to one another on a regular basis in a number of ways utilizing both new and old technology. . Put simply, social distancing has not required spiritual distancing. Though we will miss our in-person celebrations during holy days, we know our gatherings will be even sweeter and more meaningful when we are at last able to be together again safely, on the other side of this pandemic.

Worshipping in this way has not only attracted our regulars but is an easier entry point for some who, for whatever reason, are hesitant to enter our buildings. While we are grateful for the desire of government leaders to protect religious freedom, we have learned that with freedom comes responsibility. Freedom is freedom for the service and care of others.

As faith leaders in Wisconsin, we agree that the teachings of our various traditions require faithful responsibility and protection of others, and we will continue to strongly urge our respective faith members not to congregate for purposes of communal worship in this challenging time.

Blessings,

The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller, Bishop
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Faith Organizations Supporting the Statement

American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin

Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Milwaukee

Religious Society of Friends, The Milwaukee Meeting

Episcopal Church, Diocese of Milwaukee

Southeast Wisconsin Unitarian Universalist Congregations

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Greater Milwaukee Synod

United Church of Christ, Southeast Wisconsin Association

Islamic Society of Milwaukee

United Methodist Church, Milwaukee District

Jewish Community Relations Council/ Milwaukee Jewish Federation/ Jewish Federation of Madison

Wisconsin Council of Rabbis

African Methodist Episcopal Church, Milwaukee District

Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbytery of Milwaukee

Sikh Religious Society of Wisconsin

Sikh Temple of Wisconsin

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Milwaukee North and South Stakes

Hindu Temple of Wisconsin

M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi School of Islamic Sufism
Moravian Church in North America, Western District