



Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Gebiet von Mittel- und Südeuropa
Eglise Méthodiste Unie Région de l'Europe du Centre et du Sud
United Methodist Church Area of Central and Southern Europe

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A message to the UMC churches in central and southern Europe

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Exactly a week ago, I decided not to cancel the meeting of the executive committee of the central conference in Vienna. The communications from governments were: "we have the chains of infection under control, but you need to keep social distancing and meetings of more than 50 persons need to follow special rules." Already in mid-week, not everyone could travel to Vienna who had planned to do so, and three persons present had to depart within two hours before their borders were closed.

The Coronavirus has become a pandemic. We do no more control what will be possible or not in a week from now. Many react with fear. End of last week, there was panic buying. Here and there, individual persons among us know others who have been tested positively, and they worry about their health, particularly if the person ill belongs to a group of high risk. And several among us are working in the sphere of health that comes under particular strains.

I pray – together with many of you – that the promise of 2 Timothy becomes true in our lives and ecclesial witness: "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." We are no more in a situation where everything goes in its usual, well controlled way. But as Christians we are gifted with God's Spirit who wants powerfully to promote our deeds of love and our self-disciplined words and acts.

Yesterday Sunday, in many parts of the episcopal area no worship services could be held any more. From many places I have heard how creatively new tools were used to make heard the Good News in an instable situation in society. No one knows for how long the so-called "normal" life will no more be possible. It may well last much longer than the time of Lent in which we are at present.

Community and personal relationships are important signs of our ecclesial witness in our Methodist churches. Even if we may no more express it with a handshake or hugging, modern communication tools are opening up unimagined possibilities for staying in contact with each other, listening lovingly to others and doing good in a prudent way towards those who need it most in your own surroundings.

For this, I wish you all the inspiration from God in the coming days and weeks.

Bishop Patrick Streiff