

## **Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes' Faith Call on October 1, 2020**

Lisa Olson, Assistant Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS)

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DHS COVID web: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm>

**Barnes:** He and his staff have been convening these meetings with faith leaders since the onset of the pandemic to keep faith leaders up to date, find ways to work together, and support one another. Our most trying times are not yet over and they need our hope. We've entered a new and dangerous phase.

For four days in a row there have been more than 2,000 positives per day. Wear masks! Not a substitute for staying at home and distancing. Have to skip hanging out. Family gatherings need to be virtual and limit time with people we don't live with. This is the only way to get things in order. Encourage parishioners to limit contact when leave and mask up when leaving the house. Continue until we are all on the same team. A time to come together to make necessary sacrifices to save lives.

**Olson:** Today we will add over 2,800 new positive cases and over 20 new lives lost to COVID-19. And that is a very scary place to be. Think creatively about what we want to do to help. And how they can support us in the work we are doing. As they talk to health systems, DHS sees that hospitals are at a critical crossroads. Unnerving to understand to realize that DHS is limited in how to implement mitigating strategies. We are asked to help to communicate with folks. They appreciate our support to communicate with folks about steps they can take.

DHS updated dashboard to include 45 counties that have now moved into the very high activity category for COVID.

### **Questions:**

**Faith leader in Madison and statewide:** The legislature may want to undue the Executive Order for extending the mask mandate. How can we support?

**Barnes:** Reach out to legislators to make the point.

**Olson:** But there is also a court case that will be heard on Monday; we'll know more then.

**Faith leader in Milwaukee:** The State is reporting one thing and Milwaukee County another. Whom do we believe and how do we get the county and state on the same page?

**Olson:** When the state reports COVID related deaths they include COVID whether it is listed as the primary or contributing cause of death on the death certificate. Milwaukee County's medical examiner only lists COVID as a cause of death if it is listed as the primary cause of death on the death certificate.

**Faith leader in Verona and Monroe –** Will Safer at Home be coming back or more limitations placed on church gatherings.

**Barnes:** It's up to legislature but we haven't seen anything to lead us to believe something will happen to get this under control with a new order.

**Olson:** Yesterday, the Governor and DHS Secretary Palm had conversations with local public health officers and local elected officials who have the authority to put local mitigation strategies into place similar to a Safer at Home Order. DHS released a tool kit for each county to help them understand based on their current activity level what the recommended mitigation efforts would be, realizing that if the state (executive branch) had authority they would have put this in place. DHS encouraged them to use this as one of DHS' remaining strategies.

**Faith Leader in Adams:** Financial support for churches. Some are barely surviving.

**Barnes:** This question came up earlier on. Stay persistent about asking. Will the state or federal government be helping to help in the same ways businesses are helped. There is gap in helping churches and other service based institutions. Lt. Gov. will be happy to have that conversation. If we have any ideas contact him.

**Faith Leader in parish and statewide:** We need to show our disdain for these law suits. Zoom call or some other method show we have the governor's back – not to be partisan but show love for human life.

**Barnes:** Echoed faith leader. It's important that to show how serious this is. It is way worse now than in April or May.

**Faith leader in Milwaukee –** Is state giving funeral homes specific advice or are they treated like restaurants?

**Olson:** DHS has regular communication with funeral home associations and coroners. They are like any other business. Depends on local communities and orders in place. DHS encourages gatherings no larger than 10 people at a safe distance. And encouraging people to stay at home.

**Faith Leader in Waukesha:** Please give details about health care systems reaching capacity.

**Olson:** In particular, seeing hospitals surge. They have the ability to run at 85% capacity. Brown County hospitals are approaching their limits in terms of beds, not ventilators. Staffing shortages is also a problem. Health care workers are also becoming ill from COVID and are in quarantine. Post-acute care settings and nursing homes are having outbreaks and so are not accepting new patients. Mostly in North Central and North Eastern parts of state. **Press briefing today.**

**Faith leader in Clark County:** Tracking county data. Local care centers have data from national level – using test rates versus cases – so their rate of positivity is rated lower. How to reach out to them to use local county data.

**Olson:** This week DHS is reporting on both positivity by person and by test. They tell us two different things about the trajectory of the spread of the virus. Info on their website.

**Faith leader in West Allis:** Several churches in his area opened. Do we know if church re-opening is one of the causes?

**Barnes:** Doesn't know specifically, but with this kind of surge is caused by many things.

**Olson:** Most important thing to know is that COVID is everywhere and every place people are in close proximity we should assume there is risk. Is truly wherever folks are gathering is what we are seeing new information from our contact tracers.

**Faith leader in Barneveld:** Are there plans to get more Internet in rural areas? Parishioners are having trouble with school and work without good Internet.

**Barnes:** The Governor just announced a round of broadband funding - \$5 million in Cares Act Funding that will go toward this.

**Barnes:** Appreciates us. WI is the epicenter with hospital capacities in NE WI are reaching critical levels and could happen in any part of the state. He asks us to ask others to do the right thing! Feel free to reach out to him with questions.

Notes taken by Rev. Cindy Crane, director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin. [www.loppw.org](http://www.loppw.org)