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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: APRIL 9, 2020
TO: ALL MEDIA OUTLETS
FROM: JOEL STRASZ, PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER
RE: **EASTER GATHERINGS AND FAITH BASED SERVICES**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN: We are facing an unprecedented global, national and local public health emergency. I recognize that this is a challenging time for all of us, one filled with fear and anxiety about our well-being and that of our loved ones. Our religious community and houses of worship provide critical support and comfort during these difficult times. Nevertheless, I am asking all of us to do our part to protect the public's health – that means your health, the health of your family and loved ones, and the health of our most vulnerable community members.

There are 42 positive cases of COVID-19 in Bay County and we expect those numbers to continue to rise. We know that our elders and people with underlying health conditions are more at risk for serious illness. **It is our strong recommendation that people follow the Governor's Stay Home Stay Safe order and only leave their homes for essential trips (like to get groceries or medicine), that people stay six feet apart from others when they are out, that people wash their hands often and well for 20 seconds, and that people avoid any social gatherings.** We ask for your help in following these steps to help protect everyone's health and contain the spread of this virus.

The Easter season is a popular time for family traditions and gatherings. Knowing that COVID-19 can spread even before there are any symptoms of illness, it is very important to avoid any traditions that include family and friends or other people who do not live with you. These events include gathering for special faith-based services, Easter egg hunts, parades, boat rides, sporting events, etc. Instead, connect with loved ones virtually. Set up an internet connection and plan to be online together as you each eat your Easter dinner in your own home.

With the cancellation of faith-based gatherings and in-person services, considering posting sermons on social media, hosting group meetings via video chat, and setting up text or phone trees to check-in with members.

We must all do our part to protect our health and the health of others, particularly our most vulnerable community members.

In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, please follow these recommendations from the Center of Disease Control:

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
4. Avoid handshakes.
5. Avoid contact with people who are sick.
6. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
7. Wear a mask or other face covering to avoid the possibility that you might spread the virus to others
8. IF YOU ARE SICK, STAY HOME.

For the latest and most accurate information regarding the COVID-19 please go to the Bay County Health Department website at www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health and the Center for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov.