

## Presbytery of Lake Michigan

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

March 25, 2020

Siblings in Christ Jesus,

Grace to you and peace during these uncertain times. We take comfort in the promise that when our uncertainty and anguish transcends our ability to clearly articulate what we are feeling "... the Spirit intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words...."

But to communicate with each other in the current social distancing environment we need to use words, however inadequate they might be. This communication will touch on some important points of our life together.

The seeming worst of times sometimes brings out the best in us. We have been touched by the stories of people helping people in the times of crisis. Helping others in times of crisis makes us feel alive and fulfilled. And it makes us feel like we are making a difference. As pastors and church leaders, we need to offer our members the opportunity to experience the joy of sacrificing for something larger than themselves.

### Communication with Members and Regular Attendees

We are assuming that each of our congregations has utilized an ongoing communication plan to keep in touch with members during this time. While email communication is a good way to disseminate information, it doesn't connect in the way that a phone call or an audio/video connection does. These connections initiated by pastors, elders, deacons or others designated to do so not only tell us how each member is doing physically, emotionally and psychically, but they also offer an opportunity to share how the congregation is doing. It helps people who are socially isolated to feel part of their community of faith. We are a connectional people who belong to each other. Two-way communication helps build and/or maintain that sense of belonging.

When we look back at this time of the corona virus pandemic, we want to remember it as a time when the Church united to take care of one another and the community around it. We believe this is the time for all of us to invite people to live deeply into their faith commitments and to experience the joy of making a difference for the Kin-dom.

We are recommending that each congregation and faith community find ways to encourage God's people to help. The majority of our members and attendees learned to financially support the church's ministries through their participation at in-person worship services. During this time of social distancing and virtual worship, we encourage congregations to communicate the opportunities to help both during virtual worship services and in personal contact with the members. As you find out about the needs of your members and attendees, you also can also offer the opportunity for them to make a difference in meeting the on-going ministry needs.

For some among us, this means encouraging members to send their checks to the church office or the designated post office box. For others, this may be the time to encourage or initiate on-line giving. The PC (USA) has some great resources to assist you.

We commend to you the following:

- The Presbyterian Foundation's [online giving service](#) provides a quick and easy way for people to set up regular, automated gifts to the church.
- Read "[Stewardship in a Pandemic](#)" by Robert Hay Jr. (Presbyterian Foundation).

## Emergency Assistance

Congregations and pastors may qualify for Emergency Assistance Grants through the Board of Pensions. Details about these grants may be found by visiting the Board of Pensions website at [www.pensions.org](http://www.pensions.org). Once there, enter a search query *on the page* for "Emergency Assistance Grants."

## Additional Assistance

The Presbytery is prepared, on a case by case basis, to financially assist congregations and worshiping communities who experience a precipitous drop in revenue that threatens their viability. Congregations in this situation are encouraged to contact their Commission on Ministry (COM) liaison to make their needs known. The Commission on Ministry will work in concert with the Budget and Finance Committee to evaluate needs and explore options for assistance, including term-limited interest-free loans.

## Observations and Advice Regarding Gov. Whitmer's Executive Order 2020-21

We call your attention to the provisions of the executive order issued March 23, 2020, by Governor Gretchen Whitmer under 4.b for individuals to be physically in the office for basic operations, to process certain transactions, or facilitate the ability of other workers to work remotely.

Business and operations must determine which of their workers are necessary for such basic operations and must inform workers of that designation. If you choose to implement this for your congregation, please note that such designations must be made in writing, whether by electronic message, public website, or other appropriate means. This action must be taken by March 31, 2020.

Also, we are aware that the Executive Order 2020-21 states under Section 10:

Consistent with prior guidance, a place of religious worship, when used for religious worship, is not subject to penalty under section 14.

**However**, the leadership of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan **strongly advises** the congregations and worshipping communities **not to gather** in-person for worship during the period covered by Executive Order 2020-21. We encourage creativity and use of electronic means to present worship opportunities for congregational members while staff and members observe the strictures outlined in Executive Order 2020-21.

## Synod of the Covenant

On Tuesday, March 24, 2020 we received the following announcement:

The General Assembly Administrative Commission Acting as the Synod of the Covenant is pleased to announce the Reverend Dr. Charles (Chip) Hardwick has accepted the call to serve as Transitional Synod Executive, effective April 7, 2020. Many of you know Chip as the former Director of the Office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism for the PC (USA), and as pastor of several churches. He currently serves on Princeton's Board of Trustees, and as an adjunct professor at Dubuque Theological Seminary. Chip has preached world-wide and is bi-lingual (English and Spanish). He brings a breadth of gifts to this new role in mid-council leadership.

Please remember the G.A. Administrative Commission and the Rev. Dr. Hardwick in your prayers during this time of transition and change.

## Holy Week Worship

The Executive Order suspending activities in Michigan that are not deemed necessary to sustain or protect life extends through April 13, 2020, which includes all of "Holy Week."

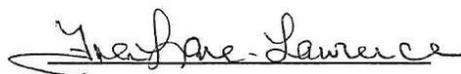
Some congregations and worshipping groups will be creative and host their own services electronically. We will examine options for a possible joint presbytery worship service to be coordinated and communicated electronically. And, in a [Pastoral Letter from the Stated Clerk of the PC\(USA\)](#) dated March 18, 2020, we were informed that there would be "...an online Easter service from the chapel of 100 Witherspoon in Louisville for those of you who would like to be part of a national experience. Easter is a new way of life — in which we are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11) and called to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4)."

In whatever form you choose, please join us in celebrating that sin and illness do not have the last word. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Serving our God and God's people in the Presbytery of Lake Michigan,



Cal Bremer  
Transitional Co-Leader



Fran Lane-Lawrence  
Transitional Co-Leader/Stated Clerk