

## Presbytery of Lake Michigan

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

December 9, 2020

Presbytery of Lake Michigan  
Clerks of Session  
Pastors with congregations  
Church Administrators

Our Dear Siblings in Christ,

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-7*

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39*

After more than ten months of COVID-19 the current realities are these:

- Most of our congregations have had members become ill with the COVID-19 virus.
- Many of our congregations have lost members of the congregation or family members to the virus.
- At the time of this writing, we have six pastors who are ill with the virus and one is in the hospital struggling to recover.
- We are grateful to God that scientists have discovered a vaccine. However, current estimates project that it will not be available to most of us until at least summer 2021.

During Advent and Christmas, our thoughts are normally focused on the preparations for and the celebration of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our homes and sanctuaries are decorated with trees full of bright twinkling lights and the deep red of the poinsettias on our chancel areas add to the excitement and anticipation of Christmas. We can scarcely wait for Christmas Eve services where we proclaim the arrival of the Christ-child in the presence of others who share in the profound meaning of an incarnate God who chose to love and save us.

But this year, those things are not to be. Instead, we will celebrate the coming of Emmanuel - God with Us – remotely and separately. Maybe for the first time in some of our lives, the night will truly be silent in a way we never imagined. And many of us will enter the celebration of Christmas a bit sad and a bit weary.

It would not be helpful to deny any of these realities and would not be healthy if we did not acknowledge and mourn all we have lost, physically and spiritually in these past months. Emmanuel assures us that we are not alone in our loss and grief.

We are more grateful to God for you, our siblings in Christ, than we have words to properly express. We marvel at your creativity and perseverance as you faithfully discover ways to worship and minister during this time of pandemic. We are touched by all the ways you have found to care for each other and for those in your community. The Gospel of Christ was loudly proclaimed within the bounds of this presbytery this past year through faithful words and deeds.

We are writing to encourage you to continue in your faithful responses and perseverance. While Christmas and New Year trigger feelings of new beginnings, the truth is: COVID-19 infections and deaths are rising daily. Our health experts tell us to expect a surge in cases at a time when many of our hospitals are already overwhelmed. We must continue to be steadfast and vigilant.

Many sessions have shifted activities in response to COVID numbers in their areas. A few of our churches are holding in-person worship. Others continue to worship online or over the phone. Some of our congregations are allowing in-person small groups for mission-critical activities. Some buildings are closed entirely with all staff working from home.

**We are writing to strongly recommend that no in-person worship be held indoors prior to March 31, 2021. We recognize that local conditions may influence decisions regarding how and under what conditions gathering for worship is deemed safe. But in every case, we encourage you to continue to:**

- **follow and enforce CDC recommendations to wear masks, both indoors and outdoors, while in the presence of others;**
- **social distance at least six feet (ten feet if possible);**
- **regularly wash your hands and not touch your face, and**
- **sanitize common surfaces.**

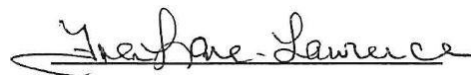
**We call attention to the aerosol effects related to speaking and especially to the dangers of singing.**

Our greatest desire is for our siblings in Christ and their communities to remain safe and healthy while the church continues to answer God's call to service and worship. We are so grateful to be your partners in ministry and give thanks to God for you always. We wish you the holiest Advent and Christmas filled with the love of God and the wonder of the Christ-child.

Peace in the name of the One who is coming,



Cal Bremer  
Transitional Co-Leader



Fran Lane-Lawrence  
Transitional Co-Leader/ Stated Clerk