

Message for March 20, 2020

In unprecedented times there may be questions emerging, or even questions not yet raised, that are quite important. Below you may find helpful information – beginning with a prayer. Use the information as you shape your Session discussions. I encourage you to contact me if you have immediate pressing needs – we are in this together in the body of Christ.

Rev. David Oyler
Executive Presbyter
Beaver-Butler Presbytery

A Prayer for Guidance

Pandemic Prayer

May we who are merely inconvenienced
Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors
Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close
Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips
Remember those that have no place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market
Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
Remember those who have no home.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors. Amen.

Source: email from Father Larry Tensi
St Columban, Loveland, OH
March 12, 2020

Short Term Concerns:

1. Has your Session made decisions about worship for this Sunday? If so, how will you work to stay connected with those who you will not be seeing face-to-face?
2. From Presbyterian Disaster Assistance: National Disaster Distress Helpline 24/7/365 crisis counseling & emotional support continues to be available for anyone experiencing distress or other mental health concerns during the ongoing COVID-19 infectious disease outbreak. Calls (1-800-985-5990; press "2" for Spanish) and texts (text TalkWithUs to 66746) are answered by trained counselors from a network of independently-operated crisis centers located across the U.S.
3. In order to support our churches in these difficult times, please remember there are several easy ways for you to continue to send your pledge giving and other contributions to support your church's mission.
 - Mail a personal check to your church.
 - Schedule a payment through your bank's online payment service, which can be a one-time payment or set up as recurring payments. Your bank will mail a check directly to the church, and there is usually no charge for this service.
 - Give online through your church's website if they have an electronic giving service. Thank you so much for your continued support of your local church and its various missions and ministries!
4. Is your church encountering difficulty in staying current with Board of Pensions dues? If so, contact the Board now to work out a payment plan so that medical coverage remains current.

Mid-Term Concerns:

1. What plans are you developing for Holy Week Services?
2. How might you share the sacrament of communion in these disruptive times? Even as you return to worship in your sanctuary how might you best reassure members that it is safe to receive the elements of communion?
3. If/when illness arises (COVID-19 or otherwise), do you and the Elders have a plan to be careful and caring at the same time?

Long Term Concerns:

None of us knows how long this difficult period will last. We all, of course, pray that the illness will ease rapidly. If not...

1. Are there weighty decisions that will involve deep discerning by your Session? If so, remember that you can arrange Zoom meetings for no cost through the presbytery office.
2. Are you having conversations with those for whom you have agreed to officiate a wedding in the coming months. Your calm presence may be quite important.
3. Some may find this to be a time to simply step back from church involvement. (Yes, I realize this is painful to contemplate, but may be the reality.) If so, what can be done now to mitigate that long term possibility?

Resources:

Yes, I recognize it can be exhausting to sort through the endless resources that are being thrown your way. But here are a few that may help you negotiate through a multitude of new issues you are addressing:

1. Prayer. Prayer. Prayer. Prayer centers us in God's will, even when there is anxiety.
2. For pastors there are 'check in' times being made available through Zoom. Check those details out in a separate email you received.
3. Your presbytery has a number of items available on the website. Search around there for your particular concern.
4. Our Synod of the Trinity is doing a fine job of maintaining a wealth of information on a wide range of topics. syntrinity.org
5. The denominational website also has a wealth of material that will help you craft your church's ministry in a time of discontinuous change. Check it out.
6. Prayer. Prayer. Prayer. Prayer centers us in God's will, even when there is anxiety.