

**A Message from Temporary Executive, David Oyler
to Pastors, CRE's and Clerks of Session**

April 27, 2020

Greetings to pastors, commissioned pastors and Clerks of Session,

The last six weeks have been a whirlwind of new experiences for all of you as leaders in your congregation. Thank you for your leadership. You are remarkable, creative and adaptive leaders!

As we turn the corner from April into May, I suspect that many of you, and the congregation with which you serve, are asking the question 'When can we get back to normal?'

The short answer to that question is 'Nobody knows.' The longer answer is 'It will be a long process spread over a long period of time.'

You are the leaders who will need to shape those discussions. Your decisions will be guided by the Holy Spirit as well as by the best medical advice available. How you shape this conversation can lead to enhanced trust, or become a flash point of challenge and division in your common life together.

As you look to the future, here are two documents that I find to be enormously helpful as you and the Session engage this crucial conversation:

The first link is available at <https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/> It is borrowed from the Wisconsin Council of Churches. It assumes that returning to 'normal' is going to take a very long time and details three phases through which churches will likely need to move. This is necessary reading (though it is exhausting to think about all the implications). A number of articles are attached as well in this link, including a fine article by Ken Braddy titled *24 Questions Your Church Should Ask Before People Return*. (There has been some criticism that this article is focused toward larger congregations, nevertheless, there are important topics worth exploring in this article.)

The second attachment (*Reopening Questions*) included above is from Cindy Kohlmann, co-moderator of General Assembly. It includes a few basic questions for Sessions to answer as you begin to consider the best way to shape ministry in the coming months.

As church leaders you have a sacred responsibility to act wisely in caring for the congregation. The sad reality is that Presbyterian congregations in western Pennsylvania have already lost church members to COVID-19. Your careful and cautious actions can help to strengthen the long term witness of the congregation you know and love.

I would value further discussion as would be appropriate. One venue for pastors to engage this conversation is in the Monday Morning Check In for pastors. You are strongly encouraged to participate as a way to hear how others are responding to the new conversations before us.

In Christ,
David Oyler
Temporary Executive
Beaver-Butler Presbytery