

March 20, 2020

Greetings Friends!

I am truly hopeful that each of you is well and coping with our current circumstances as well as can be expected. As we continue to navigate this uncharted territory together, (while remaining at a safe distance), I wanted to reach out to you on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Punxsutawney. To be specific, I felt it was necessary and important to be open and intentional about our need to remain in community with one another as we make our way through this challenging and unsettling experience. With so much uncertainty in our lives at present, I wanted to offer some suggestions that might better equip us to remain a unified, compassionate and Christ-like community of faith.

- **Be Prayerful** Simply sharing your worries and anxieties with God may ease their grip. Praying for everyone and everything in every moment can be daunting so consider praying for different groups of people or concepts in shorter bursts or in rotation. (Friends & Family, Government & Decision-Makers, Our Town/State/Nation/World, Overworked Essential Workers & Displaced Jobless Workers, Health Care Workers & Caregivers, Sick & Grieving, Elderly & High Risk Individuals, etc. etc. etc.) Add in our regular list of ongoing life challenges and prayer concerns and one can easily become overwhelmed, but it's fair to say that most of us have got some unexpected free time on our hands so why not spend a portion of it in prayer.
- **Be Communicative** In addition to staying in regular contact with family, neighbors and close friends, I urge you to remain visible to other church members. As we will not be physically seeing one another in our regular worship setting, each of us can share in the responsibility of member care by reaching out by phone or email to members of our church family. I'm always in favor of greeting cards, but exchanging a short conversation with church friends via phone or email would go a long way in securing that our church family is coping and managing in these stressful conditions. With so many of us confined to our homes, actually talking to someone on the phone could be a great boost to our psyches, or a reassuring comfort to our souls or a much needed sign that we are remembered and missed and loved. Remember not all of us have the same resources such as people or technology in our households on a daily basis.
- **Be Communicative** No, this isn't a typo. I mention this bulletin point a second time because responsible, appreciated and helpful communication goes both ways. I want to emphasize specifically and with intention that *if you are in need of help of any kind, at any point* during this unprecedented and uncomfortable experience, please, please put aside your hesitations and

contact myself, other church officers or the church office specifically. Do you need help securing groceries, medications or supplies? Do you need a ride or a book or a puzzle? Are you feeling sick or scared? Would you benefit from a daily phone call or a daily prayer? Your church family wants to be there for you...but in all honesty we'd prefer that you do your part and just flat out tell us that you'd like our help. I for one will be saddened if I find out later that someone in my congregation did without or struggled needlessly or put themselves at greater risk because they were too uncomfortable to bother me.

Church leadership including Elders and Deacons are also available to address your concerns. The Session will be having its regularly scheduled meeting this coming Monday, March 23 and the April newsletter will be published as always. Through emails, phone calls, mailers and the newsletter, efforts will be ongoing in order to keep you informed and in the loop.

If you have any concerns or questions about church (or related community) matters, you may speak to Keri, our office administrator, during office hours which remain weekdays from 9AM – to 1PM. Additionally, the church's email and answering machine are available at any time. If you need a copy of the updated church directory, contact Keri in the church office and she can mail you one. If you wish to update any contact information or provide an additional or new email address that would be most welcome. If you feel the church office is unaware that you cannot communicate via email, please call the church office and we will easily add you to the list of folks who need to be contacted by other means. Additionally, I remind you that Offering envelopes can be mailed directly to the church and as always please make sure your check and/or yellow offering envelope clearly indicates how you want your money to be spent.

Enclosed is a copy of the announcement that was emailed this past Monday, March 16, officially announcing the suspension of all church activities until further notice. I include it here to emphasize the point and to officially inform those who did not receive the email. A list of current church officers is also included.

I'm already brainstorming so many other topics that I could have included here and I feel certain that many of you have ideas that you would like to share as well. Resources abound! We shall overcome! Included on the next page, as part of my closing sentiments, I offer a prayer written by Vilmarie Cintron-Olivieri and the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, co-moderators of the Presbyterian Church's 223rd General Assembly. I hope my thoughts have been helpful to you and I look forward to being in communication with you again soon. In the meanwhile.....

May the peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all.

Debra Dinsmore
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Eternal God, sustainer, provider, God of all wisdom and knowledge,
Our spirits are weary, our faith quivers, our minds get clouded by news of sickness and death.
You know our thoughts before we express them, even the fears we dismiss, you know them.
We cannot hide our feelings and worries from you.
So, as we are, we come to You, O God, asking for wisdom, for clear minds and open hearts,
for calm and assurance that, through the crisis, You are present.

Knowing that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words,”

We ask for wisdom and protection...

For medical personnel, scientists, doctors, nurses, and laboratory technicians.

For those around the world considering current and other health crises.

For health care personnel and caregivers.

We lift them up to You.

We ask for clear minds and open hearts as people navigate daily lives...

As closures, cancellations, and quarantines are enacted.

As families gather in their homes, some caring for those who are sick.

As we encounter neighbors in our neighborhoods, stores, and pharmacies.

We pray for the sick, those who have lost or are at risk of losing jobs in the midst of this crisis,
for those whose health or social services will be or have been affected, for those suffering the direct
effects of this virus, locally and around the world.

Illumine us, Holy Spirit. Show us in what ways we can be of help as we care for self and others.

We ask for calm, assurance, and strength.

May we all remember that, in the midst of any crisis,

Your grace reaches us,

Your hope enlightens us,

And Your love surrounds us all. Amen.

Doug Chambers, Clerk of Session

ELDERS

Bill Cooper, Dana Hartman, Rex Lettie, Barb Burkett, Debby Elder,

Nick Suntheimer, Roberta Dinsmore, Wick Divelbiss, Richard Fetterman

DEACONS

Lee Blose, Kathi Cessna, Jean Hughes, Debra Dinsmore, Carole Haire,

Donna Grabany, Richard Cessna, Barbara Endress, Pam Hogan

[from the email sent 3/16/2020, revised 3/20/2020]

From the Session of the Presbyterian Church of Punxsutawney, effective IMMEDIATELY:

Until further notice, all worship services and all church-related activities are suspended in an effort to combat risks and potential exposure related to the COVID-19 outbreak. It is unknown at this time how long this suspension will last, especially pending any official government action. We encourage the congregation to have patience as we work with guidelines provided by Kiskiminetas Presbytery, our state government, and national and international authorities like CDC and WHO. We understand that the Season of Lent is a busy time, but this is done in the best interest of our congregation.

Suspended activities at this time include (but are not limited to):

-Sunday worship services

-Choir practice

-Tuesdays at 10 Bible study group

-Lenten Dinner & Study group

-Saturday Friends Out (while not hosted at the church, it is still considered a church activity)

-Men's Breakfast

-Adult Sunday School

At this time, a Session decision on the First Tuesday Community Meal scheduled for April 7 is pending. The congregation will be informed of any cancellations or changes.

The information in this email and further information from the Board of Deacons regarding member care/support, as well as any relevant updates, will be provided to the congregation in a statement to be mailed sometime this week. The office will continue to remain open during this time, but we encourage those who are not feeling well and/or who fall within the high-risk groups outlined by state, national, and international authorities to stay at home rather than coming into the office for any business. Phone and email are the best communication methods; please leave a voicemail if the line is busy or there is no answer. You may also contact Clerk of Session Doug Chambers, a current member of Session and/or a current member of the Board of Deacons with questions or concerns.

Phone and email communication is strongly emphasized—please do not come to the church unless absolutely necessary. If state and/or federal mandates require that churches cease all business and activities (including closing the office), the congregation will be informed as soon as possible.

Again, we thank you for your patience, cooperation, and understanding during this time.

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Keri Dinsmore Presbyterian Church of Punxsutawney