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*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.*

Psalm 46: 1-2

To our Pastors and Clerks of Session;

Blessings to you in this time of uncertainty. We have spoken with many of you this week and heard from most of you in some form. We continue to pray with and for you.

**WELL-DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS!**

You are doing remarkable work making sure that your congregations are safe places and that you can continue to communicate the grace of God in Jesus Christ to your communities even if the form shifts. We commend you for your calm and reasoned responses to the novel coronavirus that is in our midst. We applaud the ways that you are reminding your people that we are called to Love Our Neighbors as well as ourselves. With you, we are reminded that God is not afraid of this virus. (Thank you to Pastors Becca Bruner and Jonathan Mikesell for that language).

**WE ARE NOT ALONE: SUPPORTING EACH OTHER**

This week one pastor said, "I guess we all hold hands and walk into the woods together. . . . Oh wait! I didn't actually mean *hold hands*." We are all in this together. The reason we are a presbytery is for shared connection and support.

This past week, around 50 pastors and Clerks of Session joined Executive Presbyter Erin and Stated Clerk Michael Wilson to share information and best practices. (It was startling how much the information changed in the space of 24 hours.)

**Next week we are hosting 2 Video/Phone Conference calls using the Zoom Platform.**

- **Monday, March 16 at 10:00 a.m.**
- **Wednesday, March 18 at 10:00 a.m.**

The links to sign up for these calls are below. We anticipate we will host weekly calls until this crisis has passed. Doodle Link to RSVP for Conference Call:

<https://doodle.com/poll/seg9maud7ddknxbx>

We have also been collecting resources, including your letters to your congregations and posting them on the presbytery web page. It is accessible here: [www.donegalpby.org/resources/covid-19-response-and-resources/](http://www.donegalpby.org/resources/covid-19-response-and-resources/)

On this COVID-19 resource page, you will also find some information about live streaming and licensing requirements. There is information about electronic meetings and guidelines for live streaming provided by our denomination.

Erin and Michael are also beginning an email google group for pastors called DonegalMatters. If you would like to join this google support group please click on this link, and we will enroll you. DonegalMatters Email Group Sign up:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/45bcbb615ea74d529033403ff07943df>

## **RESOURCES FROM THE EMPATHY PRESENTATION AT THE FEBRUARY 25, 2020 PRESBYTERY GATHERING**

Friends, who would have thought at the February Presbytery Gathering that we would have such an immediate and urgent need for the resources on Empathy presented by Chris Clark. If you would like to be in touch with him, please reach out to Erin Cox-Holmes or Michael Wilson to make the connection. Here is the link for his presentation, either as a PowerPoint or a pdf:

[www.dropbox.com/sh/lv1u9u1cpfezawr/AACWNkHWIWzRI1Pa-4krzo0ha?dl=0](http://www.dropbox.com/sh/lv1u9u1cpfezawr/AACWNkHWIWzRI1Pa-4krzo0ha?dl=0)

## **WHAT ARE THE CURRENT “NORMS” FOR CHURCHES IN THESE NOT-NORMAL TIMES?**

As of Friday morning, March 13, 2020 the Pennsylvania Governor has joined others across the nation in calling for a ban on gatherings of more than 250 people, which is called “social distancing.” He has asked for assistance from religious leaders to stop the spread of the virus. The situation is literally changing almost by the hour.

Here are the emerging best practices in a rapidly changing situation

- Nationally, most large gatherings have been suspended through the end of March: this includes major sports, theme parks, and cultural gatherings. Broadway is dark.
- Many sessions are following their local school districts. They plan to cease in-person worship and other gatherings if (when) the school district closes.
- If worship is going forward this Sunday, then increased disinfection is being practiced including:
  - Disinfecting surfaces such as doorknobs and the tops of pews; urging hand sanitizing
  - Collecting offerings at the door; not passing pew pads; refraining from handshakes or hugs; propping doors or having one person open them


- Postponing communion or following careful preparation and distribution practices (contact us for more specifics)
- Eliminating food/drink events or following careful prep and distribution practices (contact us for more specifics)
- Some are already cancelling in-person worship this Sunday, March 15. We expect that this will increase for next Sunday and into the near future. Some congregations, like Westminster Presbyterian Church of West Chester, already have the capability for live-streaming. Others are rapidly working on ways to connect and be in worship together, even if not in person.

### **LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS**

We commend to you the vulnerable populations in our midst – people who are at increased risk for life-threatening illness, people who will be isolated if worship and gatherings are cancelled, those whose financial livelihood is deeply affected if work is shut down, children who will be hungry when schools close. We believe there are significant opportunities here to witness to God's grace in both word and deed. With you, we are looking for these places to act and seeking to participate in God's mission to this fragile world in which we live.

As you develop your plans for staying connected to your isolated members, including those in facilities prohibiting visitors, let us know, so we may share your ideas. As you develop your plans for serving your community (often in partnership with other agencies), let us know.

Blessings to you. Please reach out to us if there are ways that we can support you.



Rev. Dr. Erin Cox-Holmes  
Executive Presbyter



Rev. Dr. Michael Wilson  
Stated Clerk