As we move farther forward from the strict constraints of the COVID pandemic, Session, at its most recent meeting on April 20, approved the return of Boy Scout Troop 71 to meet in our building again. First Pres has a very long-standing relationship with this troop, and we welcome them back.

Session approved a motion from the Personnel Committee to offer health insurance coverage to our full-time non-pastoral staff through the PCUSA Board of Pensions. (Our pastoral staff has always received health insurance.) First Pres Church is a caring community and Session considers this a moral obligation. Offering this benefit also has the practical benefit of enabling us to attract and retain high-quality employees.

In the January Session report, I shared information about the projected church budget for 2022 and 2023. It is with deep concern that I must share that as of the end of the first quarter, church revenues are below budget by almost $28,000. Our net income for January, February and March is nearly $36,000 in the red. The importance of closing this gap cannot be stressed strongly enough. It is essential that we are able to fund our programs, personnel other fixed costs.

As Dave Potts, Business Affairs Chair, related to Session through a written letter read at our April meeting, “…if this trend continues, we will use up all the rest of our surplus carry forward from 2021, with nothing left to put toward our 2023 budget. Without any funds carrying over, this would put us with a potential deficit of almost $200,000 for 2023 (if no expenses -- personnel or otherwise -- went up.) This means that any additional spending for programs, personnel, benefits, or fixed costs would put us further behind unless we find a way to increase revenues or cut costs.”

The letter continued, “The magnitude of this gap appears greater than anything a stewardship campaign would be able to address when examining historical patterns and participation trends. So, we need to get very serious about solutions that can help for at least the 2022-25 period of time.”

As the current Session reporter, I am seeking to be transparent with you, as I believe our membership needs to know where things stand so that you can be part of the solution.

I related last month that a family stepped forward with an extremely generous gift to enable repair of our elevator, a gift for which we are so very grateful. Please allow the spirit of *their* generosity to inspire *you* as we seek to satisfy the budget shortfall.

If you have not yet kept abreast of your pledges, please consider whether you can bring your giving up to date so help bridge the gap. Additionally, please be praying about how we, as a loving congregation, and about how you, as part of our faith community, might by God’s grace arrive at a solution going forward that doesn’t include slashing personnel budgets or programs. We are a community of abundance. I pray the Holy Spirit flows over us in the coming months, all of us, Session, and congregants alike, providing ways for us to discern how to bridge the gap.