

Greetings to the beloved Saints of Mission Presbytery!

So, how are you? And I mean really, how are you? As our friend Denise Anderson recently asked Sharon Risher, how is it with your soul?

I'm doing okay. Not so great with this "new normal," but dealing with it. It seems to me like I'm praying more during this time - some of the sit-down, focused prayers, some in groups over Zoom, and lots of the "dear God please help us" as I go about my day.

And "going about" I am. What would we do without **Zoom**? It has been absolutely heartening to me to see your shining faces in different groups, as I meet with other Presbyters, the Synod of the Sun, and now in weekly regional gatherings of our pastors. It is NOT as good as being with you in person, but it'll have to do for now. I'd rather live through this time, and I'd rather that you do so as well.

Speaking of which, we've got a source of money to help pay for a **Zoom license for your congregation for one year** - that's about \$150 - if you would like to have one. Please be in touch with me and I can tell you more.

Most of our congregations have found **ways to meet electronically** during this time, either through Facebook Live or Zoom or Webex or some other source. Others are meeting by conference calls. Others are not meeting at all, but are sending out devotionals to share with their members and are staying in close touch during the week. Your creativity is stunning, and I'm thrilled to see how you're doing ministry that work in your contexts.

I am also distressed to learn that we still have a few congregations that, as of today, are still meeting in person. They are small, and they are trying best they can to stay together. I understand - but I want to reiterate what I said last week: **the time has more than come, beloveds**. I don't want you to endanger your lives or the lives of others. There are other ways we can stay connected, and it won't always be this way. I know it's hard. But the more that we shelter in place, the shorter the need for shelter will be. Please, please - listen to the authorities, for your own health and the health of your fellow worshipers and find other ways to gather as the body of Christ for now.

If you're **looking for a "virtual" congregation for this Sunday**, or if there's someone that you've just always wanted to hear preach, well, the time is upon us! You can find a list on our website of our congregations offering virtual worship. And if yours is doing so but you don't see yourself listed, please get in touch with Melody and let her know. We'll gladly add you.

One of the most heartening things for me over the past week is seeing how so many are stepping up to **care for our congregations and our people**. Colleagues are sharing support and ideas with each other. Folks in each region have helped us to be in touch with almost every congregation to make sure they've got what they need. And even as I type this, folks from COM and the Pastoral Care Committee are working together to find Honorably Retired and At-Large members of the Presbytery who might be willing to record sermons for us to post on YouTube - in the hope that smaller congregations could more easily access someone to preach during this time. Elsewhere in the newsletter you'll find the list of people that will be your best help in your region - your COM liaison, your liaison from the Pastoral Care committee, and your Regional Rep. If you have an emerging need, please be in touch with one of them. They're ready to help.

You have probably seen elsewhere in the newsletter that the Office of General Assembly has issued an advisory opinion on **whether the Lord's Supper can be celebrated virtually during a pandemic**. The short answer is, Yes. The decision to do so remains with the Session, and the Session should be clear in explaining that this will not be "the new norm." But as one of our pastors said, "My people are asking for the sacrament in a time of crisis. How can I deny them?" Once again, your creativity and pastoral spirits are at work.

Let me put in a paid commercial for **keeping your pledges up to date**. Even if we can't get to church, our congregations still need money to pay the light bills, pay the pastor, and more. And the same is true for your benevolences to the Presbytery. Congregations, as you're able, we'd be so grateful for you making sure your mission benevolence giving is up to date. You can submit your mission benevolence - as well as your camp registration or your PDA donation - all through the little green button at the top of the website. If you want to send a gift elsewhere through the Presbytery, 100% of that designated gift will go to your designee. If we can help make that happen for you, just whistle. In the meantime, many of our congregations are accepting donations electronically now too. Please remember your congregation and your presbytery when you're paying the bills.

And, speaking of paying the bills, please be in touch with me if your **congregation is getting into financial stress** in these days. Of course, we are all in the same boat there. But please talk to me if there's something we can do to help you during this time. To the extent that we're able, we are here to help. While it may be too soon to make any major decisions, I know well that anxiety levels are high. Call me and let's talk it over if you need some guidance on what might need to happen.

I know that this is not my usual Ponderings style. As you know, I'm not traveling At. All. right now, so there's not as much to put into a calendar at the end here. I cannot WAIT for the day when I can come back and visit your congregation and take pictures of you to share with everyone else! Right now, my life is pretty much Zoom calls every day, which doesn't exactly make for riveting reading. But your staff and I continue working from home, every day, to make sure that we can carry on as well as possible and be ready for when the "shelter in place" orders lift. Call us, email us, Zoom us - we're here with and for you.