



# The Presbytery of Tampa Bay

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March 14, 2020

From: Presbytery Coach & Coordinator Patrice Hatley  
To: Minister Members of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay and Clerks of Session

Subj: It's Time

It's time. We're sorry but it is. We now urge you to suspend all in-person worship and other activities, regardless of how many individuals would be gathering. This is about being faithful to our calling. This about love and care for the people and communities we serve. It is not about not having enough faith and it is really, really not about the offering plate.

Bill, Libby, and I just had a lengthy conference call. We now know there is additional guidance from health and civic officials since Bill and I wrote to you on Thursday night. The reality is that the COVID-19 coronavirus disease is within the bounds of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, even if it has not yet been reported as confirmed in your neighborhood. It is only a matter of hours or days before increased testing confirms what infectious disease specialists have already told us all from their research.

So get over waiting for the confirmation. By then it will be too late. Don't be a contributor to "community spread." Don't just tell vulnerable older people to choose to stay home.

It's become all too clear that failure to act now to limit transmission WILL result in overwhelming the healthcare system in our hospitals to an extent we can hardly imagine. Pastors have already reported being turned away from some hospitals and senior care facilities, and measures implemented at more facilities yesterday may mean they have now been blocked from entering at all. This is especially heartbreaking for ministers with a very strong sense of pastoral call. We know this and are praying for your own well-being as you lead God's beloved people.

Suspending in-person gatherings is not about fear vs. faith but about faithfully claiming pastoral authority and being accountable for making the wisest decisions as pastors, moderators, sessions, and chaplains as you lead and guide the witness of the communities where you live and serve. Have courage. Just do it. For the love of the One you serve. This is a Kairos moment.

Please refer to my last letter for additional information and resources, and Bill will be sending information on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and other PC(USA) leaders that has come out since we wrote to you on Thursday night.

Reach out to us if you want to talk this through, please. You can reach me at (863) 206-1004 or [patrice@pbty.com](mailto:patrice@pbty.com), Bill at (727) 209-7911 or [statedclerk@pbty.com](mailto:statedclerk@pbty.com), and Libby at (239) 734-1113 or [libby@pbty.com](mailto:libby@pbty.com).

Love,

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