

March 26, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Grace to you, and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that this letter finds you healthy (if a little stir-crazy). We're living in strange and difficult times and circumstances, to be sure; but, I am deeply grateful for the many ways that I have seen and heard our congregation taking care of one another and the needs of our community. Of course, keeping our doors closed is one of the ways we're caring for each other and the community; but the church building is an eerily quiet place without the sounds of children's laughter on Tuesday afternoons, or the thrill of Kathy's organ practicing on Thursdays, for instance. But just today, I posted a meme of Facebook that read, "Our church is not closed. Our church is deployed." Certainly, there are many among us who are seeking ways to bring the peace of Christ to our neighbors in a time of heightened anxiety.

I want to communicate to you that the Session was able to meet, thanks to the wonders of technology, in a "virtual meeting" over the internet. Your Session is praying for you, and so are I and the church staff (with whom I also met yesterday). The most important action taken by the Session last evening was to extend our "broadcast-only" worship arrangement *through the month of April*, and to continue to cancel non-worship activities and gatherings at the church building during that same time period. The Session will meet again in April, even as we continually assess the ongoing needs of the community and the wisdom of medical professionals and scientific advances made to meet this threat, in order to determine what our response will be in the month of May.

You may be happy to learn that, as of this writing, our worship service from this past Sunday has been viewed 423 times by an unknown (but certainly larger) number of individuals! It is a tremendous blessing of our congregation to other churches and individuals around the region—and even in other states—who are worshiping with us because their churches lack the resources or technical know-how to provide worship the way we do.

Our continued "broadcast-only" schedule raises some issues that you'll perhaps have questions about: *What about communion? Is the church receiving its offerings? What about Easter?* As for communion, we are asking that all members of our congregation come to worship with us via LiveStream or by listening on Titan Radio (88.9 FM) on Sunday, April 5, **and bring with you a bread product and some kind of juice** so that when the table is consecrated during worship, we can all partake in the Lord's Supper together. Could there be any greater act of embodying our communion in and with Christ while scattered by this pandemic than to celebrate the sacrament from our separate spaces? Additionally, the Presbytery of Shenango will be having a brief Maundy Thursday service—again hosted in our sanctuary because of our LiveStream capabilities—during which communion will be consecrated on the evening of April 9. All of the churches of the presbytery will be invited to "tune in" that evening, and to come prepared with their own bread and juice for the act of communion as we do so as a sign of solidarity and unity in Christ.

As for the offerings, admittedly they are down over the past couple of weeks, as it is a) more difficult to give to the church when you can't be in the building; and b) a time of financial uncertainty for some. Kay Taylor, our church's treasurer, assured me yesterday that our congregation is currently on good financial footing. However, if you have not yet found the way of sending your offering to the church that's right for you, I humbly request that you do so if—and *only* if—you are in a financial position to do so. We have a variety of *new* ways to make financial gifts to the church, including visiting nwpresby.org and clicking on the new "Give Now" button.

As for Easter, here is where I see a little bit of a silver lining. While it will be very difficult for us not to gather together for worship on the holiest day of the Church calendar, let us remember that on the day of resurrection, Jesus' own disciples were hiding in their homes and living in fear as well. Christ's resurrection came as surprising, bewildering, but hope-bringing good news! Perhaps we should see this as an opportunity to reflect upon those realities as we celebrate the sure and certain hope of Christ's resurrection even while separated.

More than this, it occurred to me, too, that given the fact that Easter is a celebration of resurrection and new life, the first Sunday we feel it is wise and safe to worship together in the sanctuary—whenever that may be—*will be like a second Easter*, and I hope to celebrate it as such! In all of this, I hope that you, like me, find solace in the Gospel story. Anxiety is high, and such feelings are not unjustified. But we serve a Lord who shepherds his people through dark valleys by the sound of his voice, leading us to green pastures and still waters, restoring our souls. This will pass, and when it does, we will celebrate our reunion with shouts of praise and tears of joy!

Until then, the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Yours in Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Matthew L. Camlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew L. Camlin, Pastor