

Friday, April 17, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ,

*“The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:5b-6).*

A few weeks have passed since my last letter, and the Session met two days ago via Zoom to discuss our continued activities as a congregation. The staff, as well as the Deacons, have also met and continue to coordinate our efforts to care for our members and our neighbors. Allow me to update you.

The Session discussed the current stay-at-home orders and agreed that there was little sense in trying to anticipate when such orders might be rescinded, or how; but that when that time comes, we will carefully evaluate how and when the congregation should resume its normal activities, including in-person worship, based upon the best advice being offered by organizations such as the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO). As the Apostle Paul advised the congregation in Corinth, “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial” (1 Cor. 6:12). In other words, just because Governor Wolf will say we *can* worship together doesn’t mean we *should*. When the time to resume worshipping together *does* come, it may come with “new normals” where social hygiene is concerned. The novel coronavirus is not going away—not before a vaccine can be developed that will protect us, at least—and so we will need to remain vigilant in order to protect our most vulnerable neighbors and friends.

Linda Black and Doug Phillips have been working hard to create opportunities for folks to gather for study and enrichment during this time. Brad Walters is preparing to teach a Sunday school class online, the men’s Bible study group has also resumed meeting online, and the Junior and Senior High youth groups are meeting regularly over the internet. Linda has also organized a group of readers and storytellers who are providing brief readings or reflections for young children, which will be broadcast each Sunday morning at 10:15 as part of our Live Stream.

The deacons took on two projects at its most recent meeting, both primarily related to our friends living at Shenango on the Green. First, they authorized the purchase of Roku devices which enable a person with internet access to watch our worship services on their television, just as they ordinarily would do in the Community Room. Two of these devices have been given to residents so far, enabling them to experience Live Stream in their apartments. If you would like to be able to do the same, please contact me and we will evaluate your situation and see what we can do. Second, the Deacons have begun preparing for our members who live at SOG care packages that include personal protection items such as surgical gloves and homemade face masks.

The church’s financial outlook is currently stable. Our members continue to support financially the mission and ministry of the congregation as they are able, and some of our new

electronic giving options have enabled increased participation. That said, we all know small business owners who are hurting, and folks who are currently not working, because of the mandatory closure of non-essential enterprises. Even as we pray for a swift end to this crisis, I also hope we will see this as an opportunity to reflect anew on how our shopping habits affect those we know and love. Our neighbors' livelihoods depend upon us "shopping local," and will need our patronage when we are permitted to do so.

I hope you will be as happy as I have been to learn that our Live Streamed worship services are averaging *over 450 views per week!* I remind you: our total membership is only 390, and our average attendance on a typical Sunday morning is 160-170. Another way to say this is that, during this quarantine period, our worshipping congregation has *tripled* in size, due in no small part to our ability to Live Stream our worship services and therefore offer worshipping opportunities to those whose churches are not so equipped. What a blessing that is to our community!

As I move toward closing this letter, I want to offer some words of encouragement for those of you who, like me, perhaps weathered the first few weeks of this with pluckiness and gumption but are now beginning to feel increasingly worn down. Trauma specialists have begun writing articles online about what we are experiencing together as a nation and world in terms of a slow-moving natural disaster. We expect people to feel "shell shocked" after a tornado runs through their town, for instance; but, because the threat leaves as quickly as it had arrived, folks begin quickly to recover and piece their lives back together. COVID-19 presents a very different scenario. The threat has lasted many weeks and will continue to linger for a long time to come. When society finally begins to "open up" again, it will *not* return to what it once was (nor should it).

Thinking on these things can make us feel anxious and depressed; it can rob us of good, restful sleep; it can leave us vacillating between the nagging need to *do something* and a complete lack of motivation to do much of anything. Friends, these feelings are normal for those who experience trauma. We must remember that our mental health is every bit as important as our physical health. I encourage you to try to be mindful of these feelings: to stop and think to yourself, "How am I feeling right now, and why am I feeling this way?" I shared Paul's instructions to the church at Philippi at the top of this letter with the hope that they will be of some comfort to us in this troubled time. If we use some of this time prayerfully to make our requests known to God—and including time to name those things for which we may be thankful—we can face each day trusting in God's mercy and love, and experience a peace which surpasses our understanding.

I am grateful for our common calling as disciples of Jesus Christ and members of the New Wilmington Presbyterian Church. I look forward to the day when we can greet one another again in person.

Yours in Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Matthew Camlin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Matt Camlin,

Pastor