

## Pastor's Log - June 10, 2020

We are now in the 13<sup>th</sup> week of our journey into new understandings of what it means to be a Christian community. If we were charting our course by one of those 16<sup>th</sup> century maps, we have sailed beyond the rim and into the seas of monsters. Instead, we are charting a course by way of how we understand what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus. After all, did he not promise to go before us to show us the way. And the way is known to us. Focusing on what Christ has taught us of God's intent for us, living the love that he shared, and trusting the guidance of the Spirit that informs our understanding of science, wisdom, and knowledge, we will find our way into a calmer place than we share right now.

For this worshipping community, the next step in this journey is the gathering that will happen right after worship this Sunday, June 14. We will gather for worship (see the zoom link and phone in information at the end of this), and then stay for a conversation among the whole congregation on the process of blending the two congregations, updates on the work that has been done, and the opportunity to ask whatever the question you might have. The Covenant and Ewing representatives on the Administrative Commission will share their experiences, and you will have the opportunity to share your thoughts and ask your questions. You will find attached to this the two information papers that were shared before the congregational meetings last month: Covenant FAQ, and Ewing Next Steps. Join by computer or by phone.

Finally, it is clear that we all yearn to be able to return to worshipping together face to face, in one place. Our faith is a relational faith, and our tradition in both congregations is built on presence, embraces, sharing food, laughing and singing together. But, we are in the midst of a time when each and all of those beloved things are dangerous to one another. Friends, the pandemic is real. The continuing spread of this virus is real. Yes, we may have flattened the curve of contagion, but the virus is still with us and among us. Those places that have relaxed their social distancing requirements have seen the incidence of new contagion spikes. That is real. We are a congregation that cares deeply for and about each other. That is at the heart of who this congregation is, and it needs to be at the core of our understanding of how we will reopen our Worship Space, and our facilities.

A second part of our consideration in reopening our facilities and gathering physically for worship is the core understanding that our worship and fellowship are open to any and all. The guidelines for reopening are by definition, limiting. They limit the number of people, they discourage older people, and would exclude people with health conditions. Who among us wants to be the one to tell Margie Burtis, or Sylvia Allen, or Pastor Paul (yes I am of that age too) that they can't come to worship services that others can? Are you going to be the one to tell Judy Carapezza that she can't share a hug with someone who needs one? The virus is real, and its threat to many of our members is very real. And the limitations on gathering are necessary to protect our flock from needless exposure.

You all should know that I was tested for the virus today. No, I do not have any symptoms of Covid-19. But I have participated in 4 large, mass gatherings over the past ten days. I chose to do so because I believe the issue of racism, and the systemic prejudice of our nation are important to speak out against. I also did so wearing a mask, gloves and protective sun glasses, to limit my possibly spreading the covid virus to others. Officials and specialists I trust have recommended that those who have participated in the demonstrations of the last weeks should be tested to help curtail the continual spread of this disease. I think we all should do all that we can to care for one another in that way. It is how I am choosing to share my faith.

Blessings to you all in these strange times.

*Pastor Paul*

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The link for Sunday's Worship and Conversation is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/910100569>

To join by phone, dial 929- 205- 6099, when asked enter: 910 100 569

Links to Pastor Ann's chats:

Tuesday Morning 10:00 -11:00

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81010467123?pwd=UDNqWG5pN0t3MFJUeDN5SFcvQnpzd09>

Meeting ID: 810 1046 7123 Password: 271785

Dial by your location 1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 810 1046 7123 Password: 271785

**Thursdays at 7 PM to 8 PM.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/960150849?pwd=bTdYTVV3S1M0R2xmenZSWlc5MnhMUT09>

Meeting ID: 960 150 849 Password: 079496

Dial by your location 1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 960 150 849 Password: 079496

Links to Pastor Paul's Wednesday Evening Conversation 6:30 PM:

Paul Rhebergen is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

[https://us02web.zoom.us/join/v5Esfu6oqi0ugp1INacbuQKOWmtqiHG3dw/ics?icsToken=98tyKuutrzltGtCtF-Cd7UvA9rib\\_Gxl3Ze-4pznRznFhF4TTTT7lvNLGpUsFM-B](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/v5Esfu6oqi0ugp1INacbuQKOWmtqiHG3dw/ics?icsToken=98tyKuutrzltGtCtF-Cd7UvA9rib_Gxl3Ze-4pznRznFhF4TTTT7lvNLGpUsFM-B)

Phone in 1 929- 205- 6099 or 1 301 715 8592

Meeting ID: 251 970 464

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## INFORMATION TO GUIDE US THROUGH THE NEXT STEPS

The following information, and the FAQ page developed by the Covenant leadership that follows, are provided to help you understand what will be happening over the next month and a half.

The Ewing and Covenant Churches continue to move forward toward our blended future. In April both Sessions and the Presbytery's Administrative Commission set June 28 as the target date for the completion of the legal and ecclesiastical work of bringing the two congregations into one. The two congregational meetings held on May 17 and May 24 will path the way for the congregational actions that need to be taken. On June 14, the two congregations will gather together on-line for an information sharing gathering. Then on June 28 it is anticipated that the final actions will be taken to bring the two congregations into one.

Below we will answer some questions that have come through to Ewing's leadership. The FAQ Sheet that follows responds to questions raise with Covenant Leadership.

### **1) As a blended congregation, will we continue to offer online worship during in person worship after we are able to return to worship at the church?**

The elders of both sessions have agreed that it will be important for us to continue to provide ways for people to worship with us online after we have returned to worshipping in our Worship Space. The way we do it may be different, but it will continue.

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**2) What will happen with the Ewing Church Cemetery and the 1867 Sanctuary?**

They will continue to be the property of the corporation of the church, and the current contracts that govern their use will continue to be in place. Preservation New Jersey's contract with the Presbytery will continue to govern its use. The Ewing Church Cemetery will continue with that name, and to be open to the public for burials and interments.

**3) As a blended congregation, will we continue to offer the use of our facilities to groups such as AA and other, and will our relationship with Head Start continue.**

Early on in the conversation between the two Sessions, continuing to be a gathering place for 12 Step programs and other self-help organizations was identified as a major priority. We will continue to be a gathering place for the groups that have met at Ewing Presbyterian. Head Start is in the second year of a 5-year contract to use the church's facilities. That relationship will continue for the foreseeable future.

**4) Will we still have all of the various committees after we blend and how would we determine what the committees will be?**

The Session will continue to have the responsibility for the full ministry of the church, and the structure for carrying out of that work. Both Sessions had been moving away from a strongly defined committee structure: Ewing having an operations group that worked with facilities, finance and administration, and Program, working with stewardship, worship, mission and education; Covenant working more as a committee of the whole. The new Session will develop the working structure for the church. There will be a Nominating Committee and a Personnel Committee, both made up initially with a blending of people from the two former congregations.

**5) What will be the various mission work to be done by the blended congregation and how will that be determined?**

The mission work currently supported by the two congregations will become the work of the one. We will continue to encourage people to give their time to the places they volunteer now, and will continue to give financial support to organizations that carry out local caring ministries. The blended congregation will continue to support our denominational mission through the Presbyterian Disaster Relief, and designated mission giving. The Session will continue to seek ways to carry out our mission locally and worldwide.

**6) Will there be any change to how we conduct our Christian education and Sunday school programs?**

The only change would be to strengthen them. As we return to on-site worship, we would continue to offer education time for both children and adults during the hour following worship. Sam Bonner's 9:00 Sunday morning Bible Study would continue.

**7) In what ways will we continue to support the older members of our blended congregation and how will that be determined?**

As in all things, the Session carries the responsibility for the care of the people of the church. The care of the older members has been a priority of the two congregations, and will continue to be one for the blended congregation. The Care Team Ministry will continue in all of its aspects will continue; the Parish leader contacts that have been so effective these last two months will continue; as will the visitation and calling that individuals in the church have carried out. The Session will include ECHO and ROAM, two ministries that support seniors, in the discussions for funding.

**8) How will the name for our new congregation be chosen?**

The new name for the congregation will emerge in the next few months from the work of the Future Visioning Team as it works with the congregation to claim who we are as a congregation and to provide the focus for the way ahead. Don Lovett, Helen Kull, Ralph Simms, Katie Houghton, and Jarred DeWees have been

appointed to this Team from the Ewing Congregation. This team will provide recommendations for how the church is structured, what to emphasize in our ministry, priorities for our work. A new name, with a brief mission statement, and a logo to build our presence in the community will all be part of that work. The work of this team will also help define the skills, talents and the structure for the congregation's future pastoral leadership.

If you have a suggestion for a new name for the congregation, send it to Pastor Paul or Pastor Ann.

We hope this is helpful. Bring your questions and concerns to our on-line congregational meeting on May 24<sup>th</sup>, following worship.

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### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

As Covenant anticipates the end of our journey to discover our future as God's people, we will again let go of the past and step into the future.

***See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:19)***

On March 5, 2019, we heard from the Joint Task Force concerning the feasibility of blending of the congregations. We were reminded of Numbers 13, and how after scoping out the land, Joshua would lead the people into the "promised land" saying: The land was good and if God intends to give us the land, God will be with us.

At our June 28, 2020 congregational meeting, our congregation will be asked to vote on dissolving the corporation of the Covenant Presbyterian Church of Trenton. Yes, there will be some sorrow. But at the same time we will celebrate a new beginning! We know that God's Holy Spirit is at work among all of us. We will no longer think in terms of "Ewing" or "Covenant". We will be one congregation, not unlike a marriage.

In preparation for that vote, the Session has prepared answers to the following frequently asked questions.

#### **1. What took so long?**

It seemed like the process would never end, right? As is typical, few if any meetings were held during the summer. The primary reason was that there were delays in getting information needed for the financial audits to be completed. Be assured the Sessions and Finance Committees worked diligently to complete process as quickly as possible and with good results.

#### **2. Will we continue to have two pastors? Will Ann Schoonover remain as a pastor serving the blended congregation?**

This question will be examined by the new congregation and Session. No immediate changes are planned.

#### **3. Who will our leadership be? (e.g., Session, Officers)**

a. The Session shall consist of the 17 Elders from the previous congregations: 11 elders from Ewing Presbyterian Church, 6 elders from Covenant Presbyterian Church, divided into three classes according to the date of their election to their current term. The Session will consist of one less Elder each year through attrition by class, until there are 12 serving elders in 2025.

b. There shall be fifteen (15) Deacons divided into three classes, one class of whom shall be elected each year at the annual meeting for a three-year term. No Deacon shall be elected for a term of more than three years, nor shall a Deacon serve for consecutive terms (full or partial) aggregating to more than six years. A Deacon having served a total of six years shall be ineligible for reelections to the same board for a period of at least one year.

c. The corporation officers (President, Secretary/Clerk, and Treasurer) will be active Session members, nominated and elected by the Session. The specific individuals have not been identified at this time.

#### **4. How are finances going to be combined? What will happen with Covenant's investment accounts? What will happen with Memorial Funds?**

All investment accounts, including memorial funds, will belong to the new congregation. The Finance Committees are working to combine funds where possible, keeping the original intention in place. Investments will remain as they are until this work can be completed. As to where money will be invested, the Finance Committee will make recommendations to the Session, ensuring the best possible return on investments and considering any other important criteria.

The "Covenant Legacy Fund" has been renamed "Covenant Community Mission Investment Fund." Its purpose is to address mission concerns outside of the congregation, yet close enough that members are able to have regular, in-person contact with the recipients. For the first four years (through 2023), the fund will serve vulnerable youth. It will be administered by a committee of five (5), three from the former Covenant members and two from the former Ewing members. They are: Dick Anthony, Barb Brezak, Jane Schwilk, Pam Hoffman and Laura Wallin.

#### **5. What will our new name be?**

The new name will come organically from the results of the visioning process and will reflect who we are becoming as the new congregation. The entire worshiping community will have input to the process. It will eventually be voted upon at a congregational meeting. The timing is not definite, but it will hopefully occur within a year.

Note that the corporation may continue to use for legal purposes the name First Presbyterian Church of Ewing and Ewing Presbyterian Church. The cemetery will continue to be called the Ewing Church Cemetery.

#### **6. Now that the blending/merging is complete, what's next?**

Over the next year we'll be working to complete the transition of finances and the visioning process.

Financial: The plan for merging the funds and accounting system was developed prior to the blending. This plan will continue to be implemented after blending. Completion is not necessary for the blending to occur.

Visioning: A visioning committee will work to discern and create a vision statement. This discernment process is intended to capture, to the best of their ability, God's call to the new congregation. The Covenant members on that committee are Pam Miller, Betty Newberry and Mike Kuschyk.

When the congregation is ready, and with the concurrence of the Committee on Ministry of New Brunswick Presbytery, the process for the selection of the next pastor will begin.

#### **7. What happens to remaining property of Covenant?**

Any Covenant property remaining will become the property of the blended congregation.

#### **8. What liabilities and debt will Covenant take on when we become a blended congregation?**

For both EPC and CPC, any liabilities or debts, as well as incoming monies, will all become those of the new congregation.

#### **9. How will membership be transferred, what happens to status as member of Covenant?**

We sincerely hope that all current members and friends will continue to part of the new congregation. We need and appreciate you!

Current members of both congregations will automatically be transferred to the new congregation— no action required. If someone chooses not to be a member of the new congregation, he or she should write a letter to the Session asking to withdraw their membership. "Friends" of the congregations who haven't actually joined either congregation are encouraged to ask to join the new congregation.