



*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ*

On behalf of our risen Lord I bring you greetings and welcome you to our first online Presbytery meeting. This promises to be an unusual gathering of the faithful but may not be our last online meeting as we all navigate the uncertainties of the current global pandemic.

As I write this, I am deeply aware of the COVID-19 related deaths that have occurred in many of our congregations. I am aware of the extra toll these two months have taken on our pastors and congregational leaders, chaplains, and those serving in community ministries. Please be assured that we hold you in prayer as we continue on this unprecedented journey.

There are many blessings of being your Moderator, chief among them in the last two months has been the opportunity to witness the abounding creativity and commitment of those in our Presbytery. I am encouraged on a daily basis by the resilience and grace that is displayed during this time of unprecedented anxiety and concern. It is uplifting to see the many ways you are salt and light to a world that is in pain.

Like many of us, I am able to fully commit to my vocation and when on vacation, can fully commit to relaxing and fun. What I have never been able to fully accomplish is a balance of both in my daily life. Similarly, as stressful as isolation has been and still is for many of us, we are facing a future where we cannot be fully isolated nor fully in contact but will be called to balance both. The way we have responded to the current situation gives me great confidence that together we will navigate the new boundaries as we work together to spread the word and the gospel of Jesus Christ while protecting the health and welfare of our friends and family.

This on-line Presbytery meeting will be a great example of how we may continue to hold each other up while maintaining a social distance. We will have a time to share some of our personal experiences of the blessings of isolation as well as some of the challenges. We will joyfully commission members of our body to attend the General Assembly as they prepare for a historic virtual gathering in June. In spite of the pandemic, our work as a Presbytery continues. You will hear of the grants that have been provided to congregations especially hard hit by this situation and will also hear of opportunities for future grants both through the Presbytery and from other organizations. In this time of anticipation and hope for the future, we will also lift up in gratitude the faithful witness of the Macalester-Torresdale Presbyterian Church as they enter a new season of life.

As we face the new future together, this is an especially important time to remind ourselves that as Presbyterians we believe in the power of our connectional denomination. Our witness and work in the world are strengthened by communion with each other. This meeting, although in an unusual format, will be just as joy filled as our in person meetings have been - and hopefully will be in the future. I look forward with great anticipation to our time together.

Grace and peace,

*Vijay Aggarwal,*

Moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia