

March 13, 2020

Dear Pastors and Churches of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley,

“The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. “You are Christ’s body—that’s who you are! You must never forget this.” (1 Cor. 12: 25-27)

In this moment of an unfolding global pandemic, it is more important than ever that we re-commit ourselves to creating and living into communal best practices, in order to promote the well-being of the whole of the body of Christ. This letter addresses both *actions taken* regarding the Presbytery and includes *recommendations* to congregations regarding worship and meetings at local churches. The following actions and recommendation are our best responses and are intended to reduce the risk to the most vulnerable members of the body of Christ in our Presbytery.

Effective Immediately to March 27:

- **All** in-person meetings of the **Presbytery** are now suspended. Scheduled meetings will be conducted through the Zoom platform in compliance with the existing Electronic Meeting policy of the Presbytery.
- **Presbytery Offices will be closed to all non-staff persons.** All matters requiring staff response should be conveyed using email as phone calls and voice mail will not be attended to during this period of time. The Leadership Team will be working with staff to address options for working from home and/or staggering work hours in an effort to promote healthy social distancing.
- **Presbytery Pastoral Care** will be provided by contacting:
 - Moderator Roger Estes - 585-353-1085
 - Moderator-Elect Colin Pritchard - 585-734-7007

We, the members of the Presbytery Leadership Team, also offer the following **guidance to congregations** in order to empower congregations to faithfully and prayerfully discern how to address worship, meetings and pastoral care during this important time of social distancing.

It is highly **recommended** that congregations suspend in-person worship and meetings through at least March 27. If your worship services usually gather 500 or more persons, the State restriction *does* apply and such a gathering is prohibited. Congregations of less than 500 persons are now required to reduce their maximum occupancy by half in order to be legally permitted to gather. That being said, the following is the **preferred best practice currently being recommended** by the Leadership Team of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley.

- **Suspend In-Person Worship:**
 - Live-Streaming Worship: If your congregation has an already existing Electronic Meeting policy, churches are encouraged to explore offering an online worship service; platforms such as Facebook Live provide said services.

- Music Considerations: Keep in mind that CCLI and other licenses do not automatically cover the electronic transmission of all music; music and hymns offered in the public domain may be the best risk-free option
 - Collaboration: Opportunities exist for Presbytery Neighborhood Pastors or other church groupings to collaborate to lead one service for multiple congregations; if you are not tech-savvy, collaborating with someone who may have that skill set may be a good option
 - Online Giving Option: The Presbyterian Foundation offers an Online Giving service for congregations—for more information about this option call 1-800-848-6127 or visit <https://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/onlinegiving>
- **Suspend In-Person Meetings:**
 - Electronic Meetings: If your congregation has an already existing Electronic Meeting policy, churches are encouraged to explore offering an online meeting platform such as Zoom. Zoom has a free meeting option and a low-cost meeting option worth looking into at <https://zoom.us/pricing>
- **Continue Pastoral Care of the Congregation:**
 - Congregations are highly encouraged to intentionally reach out by phone, email or social media to other members, especially the homebound or those living alone, so that the community remains connected and immediate needs/concerns can be promptly attended to
 - Pastors will need to use their best judgement regarding in-person pastoral care during this time of potential community spread of Covid-19
- **Resources** for Congregations can be found at Presbyterian Disaster Assistance at <https://pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/disease-guidance-for-congregations/> and at the NYS Department of Health https://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/docs/cleaning_guidance_houses_of_worship.pdf

The Presbytery Leadership team will re-evaluate the above actions and recommendations on March 27, 2020 and update you at that time. May God be with us all as we seek to faithfully serve the Lord in these uncertain days.

In Christ,

Rev. Sue Thaine, Convener of Big Picture Team
 Elder Roger Estes, Moderator of Presbytery of Genesee Valley
 Rev. Colin Pritchard, Moderator-Elect of Presbytery of Genesee Valley
 Elder Susan Orr, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley