

THE COVENANTER
March 15, 2020

Member NE GEORGIA Presbytery, Synod
of the South Atlantic, General
Assembly of the Presbyterian Church
(USA)

The gospel call to "be not afraid" is surely being tested as we face the coronavirus crisis. How do we continue to gather as God's people and serve our neighbors with compassion and hospitality, while also respecting everyone's health and safety? The session will be meeting this Sunday to discuss reasonable practices and responses that we will be undertaking in the days ahead.

In the meantime, here are some important things to know:

Beginning this Sunday, March 15th, we are suspending our corporate gatherings for worship, Sunday school, ministry team meetings, and Covenant Connection indefinitely. While this feels counter-intuitive to our gospel DNA, this seems like the best way we can love one another and our larger community at a time when public gatherings need to be drastically limited.

We are working on a live-streaming option for worship, and this Sunday we will attempt to tape a service that you will be able to access through You Tube on Covenant Channel CPC 2020. I'm aware that this will not make worship accessible for everyone, but I hope it will be one way for us to stay connected and rooted in God's love. Please be patient as we navigate this challenging time. I'm sure the session will discuss ways for meetings to occur via services like ZOOM.

Second, Rindy, Karen, and I plan to continue coming into the office during the week. We will find ways to be in touch with you and offer pastoral care -- even if the best option is by phone. Please do not hesitate to call if you have a particular need or simply need to talk. We will be coordinating with congregational care to look for ways that we might help those who prefer not to venture out to get groceries and needed medications.

Third, it is our deep desire to continue serving our food insecure neighbors through our food pantry. If those of you who have signed on as volunteers feel comfortable continuing in this important ministry, we would be most grateful. However, we also respect anyone's decision to take a step back. As far as FEAST goes, we are considering several options and early in the week will be sending out word on whether the March 21st distribution will go on as scheduled. These are challenging times, no doubt. But God's people have found their way through the wilderness before, and our Creator promises to remain with us even now. Let's lean into these difficult days with faith, hope, and love, trusting that we are being held in God's grace even when we cannot literally embrace one another.

Grace & Peace, *Mark*

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Prayer Concerns: Brandon Doughty in the passing of his mother March 12th; for those who are affected by the COVID-19 illness, as well as their caregivers, our healthcare professionals, government leaders and those who are working around the clock to minimize the impact of this virus; Heide Wiegel undergoing back surgery 3/16; Shirley Reinert recovering from a car accident; Covenant's Puerto Rico Mission team as they travel home; Mike Swanson preparing for cancer treatment; Paula Zimdars ongoing merkel cell carcinoma treatment; Anne Page at Avery Place #145; Ruth Brewster at Arbor Terrace #222; Pauline Marshall at Highland Hills #112; John & Elizabeth Brewer, & Anna Holshouser at home.

As the Coronavirus continues to spread, so do fear and misinformation. Here are some simple actions that will help reduce your risk, and also reduce the risk of others.

1. **Wash your hands.** It may seem boring and “old news,” but it works. Wash with clean running water and lather with soap; don’t forget the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and also your nails. Scrub for at least 20 seconds – this is about the amount of time it takes to sing the Doxology. (How good it is to remember to praise God, even in the midst of this crisis!) If you use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, the gel must contain at least 60% alcohol, and this should also be done for about 20 seconds.
2. **Stock up.** Make sure you have at least a 30-day supply of prescriptions, as well as over-the-counter medicines for flu, food staples, and laundry detergent. For families with young children, buy sufficient diapers. You may also want to purchase bottled water.
3. **Develop a plan.** Planning prevents panic. Create an emergency checklist and action plan, and share with all family members. Be in contact with schools regarding their contingency plans, and think ahead about dealing with early dismissals or closures. Prepare for caring for elderly family members or those with special health concerns.
4. **Use common sense.** Get a flu shot; avoid people who are coughing and sneezing; don’t make hospital visits unless absolutely necessary. Please note that health experts say face masks are fairly useless in preventing infection. If, however, someone has contracted the virus, then they should wear one to prevent spreading the illness. Get plenty of rest, eat healthily, and maintain a good exercise regimen.
5. **Keep calm and trust God.** Stress and anxiety can compromise your immune system. Don’t fixate on the news; instead, feed your soul with God’s word. In Psalm 46 we read: *“God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...Be still, and know that I am God.”* Remember, too, that we are always called to serve others who are hurting and fearful; be open to situations where God can use you to be a calm and helpful presence in the lives of others. Let the love of Jesus be shared through us wherever it is most needed.

For more information, please visit the website of the Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/

Blessings,

Rev. Ed Rees
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