

Covid-19 Responses and Guidelines – Carl Utley, Transitional General Presbyter

I'm still trying to wrap my mind around all that is occurring in our present time because of Covid-19. In light of the Governor's executive order that goes into effect tonight, I urge the following:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

In the midst of all the uncertainties, put your confidence in God. Faith does not exempt us from trouble, but in Christ God is certainly with us and already at work to heal our distress.

"Pray without ceasing." The full text from 1 Thessalonians 5 reads:

"Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, **pray without ceasing**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Under stress, people are prone to get fussy and impatient. **The will of God in Christ is clear – we are called to be peacemakers, now more than ever – to encourage, to help, to nurture patience, to resist evil, and to do good.**

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

For goodness' sake, stay home. Love your neighbor by keeping your distance. Suspend ordinary congregational worship and gatherings through April 22nd.

Even congregations that regularly worship with fewer than ten people, exercise the extreme caution and common sense that medical professionals are urging. God is glorified when we unite in a common purpose – to take care of each other and prevent further illness.

I know – that cuts into Holy Week and Easter. The resurrection, however, is a reality that can be celebrated in our homes and next year we can celebrate together again. Take the long view. The Lord still reigns and will in 2021.

Make use of technology as it is available to you. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Psalm 24:1) The internet may not be an unqualified good, but it certainly can connect us.

The presbytery is collecting online worship services, teaching, and devotionals, that pastors and congregations are creating and posting. We are also posting regularly on the presbytery's Facebook page.

If members of your congregation do not have internet access, send them a hard copy of what you are doing. Paper, postage, and mail service still work.

The Presbytery staff will be working from home for the next 30 days. We will continue to check mail and voice messages, answer emails, collect and disburse funds, and assist you in all the ways that we able. Committee meetings will be held via Zoom or conference call. We will also take advantage of the time to attend to the writing projects that we as a staff never have time for in the ordinary course of business.

The May 2nd Presbytery meeting will undoubtedly be cancelled when Cabinet meets this Thursday. The cabinet will consider a proposed called meeting for Saturday, June 13th, for essential business. It would be a morning only meeting at the presbytery office. We will wait and see what is possible.