

March 19, 2020

Dear Friends,

We live in one small nook of the northern hemisphere of our planet, and in this little corner of all that God has created and loves, the approach of spring declares once again the great gift of community. Just over that last week or so, the symphony of morning birdsong has returned. The cardinals are singing again, along with robins, finches, towhees, song sparrows, and mockingbirds. To get up early, crack open a window and feel the cool air while listening to the birds sing the sun up is an experience that never grows old. And when one makes it a kind of discipline of joy and thanksgiving, it becomes prayer in the most deeply true and transforming sense.

We live in the midst of this wonder and are a part of it. That's why it is so difficult these days to separate ourselves from it to the degree that we must. We are part of that community, and we want to share in it with others. Yet, these are days when, because of the coronavirus, we are called, as Mark McCalman says, to "change behavior and save lives."

Members of the new Emergency Response Team met by Zoom yesterday to discuss ways that we can support the session and its committees in the coming weeks. And encouraging all of us to stay home as much as humanly possible is the #1 priority. Ironically, but quite simply, isolating ourselves from each other at this moment makes life healthier for all of us. As difficult is and will be, it is equally necessary.

"Social distancing" is hard enough for individuals, and for an intentional community like a church, it's especially challenging. Just know, then, that the session and I recognize that we are not on vacation. This is a time in which, over the course of a few days, we have realized that we must learn how to "do church" very differently, and perhaps for quite some time. So, we will hold some kind of live worship experience on Facebook at 11:00am on Sunday mornings. (Thank you, Bill Reese!) We will hold meetings by Zoom. Carol Jernigan and I will visit by phone. We will all work on ways to help everyone feel connected to the community.

To that end, PLEASE, keep in touch with each other.

- Send cards to people you know do not have computers or smartphones.
- Call each other.
- Pray for each other.
- Agree with someone to read a book, watch a movie, or try a new recipe, then call each other and talk about it.

This too will pass, but the more distance we keep between each other now, the less distance there will be between the present moment and the moment we all get back together in person.

Karen Welch (a member of the response team) suggested keeping the following passage in mind as a place from which to center ourselves and focus our actions and our goals during this experience:

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:1-4)

As one very important practical matter, here is a note from the Stewardship/Finance Ministry Team:

Dear Friends,

Even though our church is not meeting for worship, our bills and our staff still need to be paid. We are making every effort to minimize the financial impact to our church as well as maintaining the proper handling of tithes and offerings. Therefore, when mailing them to the church please mark the envelopes as follows: JONESBOROUGH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*P. O. BOX 383
JONESBOROUGH, TN 37659
ATTN: TREASURER
(*Note: PLEASE DO NOT MAIL CASH)*

May God's grace, peace, and strength be with you all.

Allen

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