

Thursday, May 28, 2020

Dear Church Family and Friends,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and welcome to my weekly Letter to the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Hot Springs, Arkansas. I'm glad to report once again that no one in our church has contracted the COVID-19 virus and that I am unaware of anyone in the hospital. See an updated prayer list in my "Getting Ready for Sunday" article, which will be sent to you later today.

I enjoyed opening my laptop last evening and greeting session members, in our separate homes, at our May stated session meeting by ZOOM conferencing. These individuals are a considerable strength to me personally during these times of loss and change. We updated one another on our lives and families, and prayed for each of you as we began our work. Please hold all session members in your prayers as they discern God's will for our church and future.

As promised, the session spent much time discussing when and how it would be appropriate to re-open our church. We studied statistics provided by the Arkansas Department of Health and the schedule of "Phases" for the re-opening of houses of worship provided by Governor Hutchinson. We also discussed the efforts it would take for us to comply with the guidelines for reopening our church during Phase II, which begins June 6. Another major factor we considered is the age and risk factors of our members.

After considering all these components, the session decided to keep the church closed to all worship, education, fellowship, and service activities until two weeks after entering Phase III of the state's plan of reopening, to insure the health and safety of our members and staff. The State of Arkansas has not yet set a date for Phase III to begin, so the session will re-evaluate this decision at its June 24 stated meeting. Until then, we will continue to stay in touch with you by email and first-class communications, and by continuing the video worship presentations that have been a source of strength in our time apart.

The Finance Committee thanks the congregation for mailing your pledges and offerings to the church during our time apart. Because of your support, the budget remains in good shape and has been able to address a few unexpected expenses. Last evening, the session approved research done by our Financial Secretary, Jessica Rowton, and gave her approval to set up online giving through our website. Be looking for updates and instructions on how to access this secure and easy way of supporting the church.

Ian Poole reported that the Nominating Committee will hold its first meeting of 2020 on June 10 at the Carney home to begin recruiting ruling elders and deacons for the coming Class of 2023. Be in prayer for their work, and feel free to call Ian with the names of those you think would make good leaders in our church.

Don't forget that the Presbytery of Arkansas is meeting on Saturday, June 6, from 8:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. by ZOOM conferencing and visitors are welcome to attend. All you need is your laptop, tablet, or smart phone and a pre-registration to attend. To register, simply log into:

<http://www.presbyark.org/about-2/presbytery-meetings/>

If you want to see something funny, go to the presbytery website and see Stewart Smith's "Top Ten Reasons" for attending presbytery meetings online. It's hilarious!

I thank all church committees who have been at work this month completing their business and re-thinking their future. As we have heard before, the other side of the coin "problem" is "opportunity." I truly see much opportunity ahead for our church as we discern God's will during the pandemic we are experiencing.

Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your calls and correspondences. Thank you for your patience and positive outlook. Together we are the Body of Christ!

In Christ's service,

***Lacy***