

A message from Sue Krummel, Executive Presbyter:

For leaders in congregations, the current health crisis is new territory. After seeing a much smaller crowd than usual where I was in worship on Sunday morning, it occurred to me that there may be a few issues for you and your session to consider.

You will be the ones to make the best decisions about which events will continue as usual—including worship—and which you will alter in some way.

Here are the things you will want to talk about with your session and other leaders in your congregation.

- How will you continue to include those who are ill or afraid or following the recommendations or requirements of governmental officials in worship and other spiritual practices of your congregation? Do you have a way to produce videos of worship? Are you on Facebook live? Do you post your worship services to Youtube? Does your pastor post the sermon or prayers? This is a good time to increase your online presence so that all of your members and friends can stay connected to your group spiritual practices over the next weeks and months.
- Have you considered holding smaller events as Zoom meetings or by Skype or Facetime? For instance, do you have a Bible study that meets regularly? If it becomes important for people not to meet in person, have you helped them find a way to continue that practice electronically?
- What about pastoral care? This is the time to remind your Deacons, Elders, Stephen's Ministers and staff that they should not make pastoral visits if they are themselves feeling unwell. This is also a time to think about how to help people feel the care offered by your congregation without physical contact; do you have a robust ministry of sending written notes, making phone calls, and contacting your shut-in or ill members or those experiencing loss by electronic means?
- Do you have a way for members to make contributions electronically? The best way to do that is to have people set up Electronic Funds Transfer so that their contributions are made on a regular basis. (Your bank or the Presbyterian Foundation can help you with this.) Is there a place on your website where people can make an online contribution? Can people contribute by text? This is the time to improve all of these systems for your congregation.

But perhaps the most important thing your leaders can be doing now is planning about how you will get people back. For the next few weeks or even months it is likely that there will either be smaller congregations present in sanctuaries, or we will make the decision or be ordered to cancel worship altogether. People will find out that there are other things to do on Sunday morning; they will find other ways to meet their spiritual needs. The trend in this country is already away from worship attendance. What kind of event will you sponsor, what kind of special worship will you have, what kind of celebration will you have to welcome people back to church when this is over? And that is what we need to remember—it will be over.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39