



COVID-19 Response Information, Inspiration & Prayer The Presbytery of Ohio Valley



Dear Friends in Christ:

One of the items on the Presbytery Council's agenda at our most recent meeting was to consider our guidance to congregations concerning in-person, indoor worship.

There is promising news. The number of new cases is decreasing in many parts of our country, and new vaccines have proven to be effective. We are beginning to see some light at the end of what has been a very long tunnel.

At the same time, public health officials have cautioned us that we are not yet at the end of that tunnel. Vaccine availability does not meet the current demand. New variants of the virus are emerging, all of which are more transmittable, and some of which are also more deadly. We are urged to remain vigilant in exercising the public health recommendations that have been in place for months, such as wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, and avoiding indoor gatherings with persons outside our households. This is not the time to relax our standards.

Given these concerns, the Presbytery Council recommends that sessions and pastors of congregations continue to exercise extreme caution concerning decisions about indoor, in-person worship and other gatherings.

Again, please know that we are not directing session to make a particular decision; neither the Council nor the Presbytery has the authority to do so. We are, instead, expressing our concern for the congregations of this presbytery.

These decisions are difficult, to be sure. We are aware that this may be the second Easter when congregations will not gather indoors and in-person. In addition to the sense of grief and loss that pastors and people may feel, there are also practical concerns about how to observe the seasons of Lent and Easter. Here are a few resources:

Presbyterians Today is offering an online Lenten Devotional, that can be downloaded or accessed

online: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today/lent2021/>.

The Presbyterian Outlook is also offering online worship and Christian education resources here: <https://pres-outlook.org/category/ministry-resources/worship-resources/>

Pyoca is offering a resource, “Easter in a Basket” (otherwise known as “Holy Week in a Box”), an at-home program provides a week-long experience from Palm Sunday through Holy Week, diving into the stories that prepare us for Easter Sunday. This is a hands-on resource that will be shipped from Pyoca (pick-up can be arranged). The Council is offering a subsidy of \$10 per box for the first 250 boxes. Please visit here for more information: http://pyoca.org/programs/easter_basket.php/.

Congregations who are offering online opportunities for worship are invited to let the presbytery office know how to access the online worship, and we will make these available to the rest of the presbytery. Please be in touch with [Stephanie Worden](#). This includes Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday as well as Sunday services. Susan McGhee will send these out on the day before the service, along with one of her “Holy Days and Holidays” offerings.

We will continue to send out other resources as we are aware of them.

We thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and for all the ways that you seek to be faithful in these strange and unsettling times. We continue to long for and hope for the day when we will see one another with uncovered face, when we will be able to sing together and share a meal together, when we will be able to serve side-by-side. Most of all, however, we hope that we will continue to exercise sound judgement and strong faith, waiting on the Lord, who gives us all that we need in every circumstance.

On behalf of the Presbytery Council —

Peace and all good,

Susan

The Rev'd. Susan C. McGhee

Executive Presbyter

The Presbytery of Ohio Valley

866-344-7853

1701 E 2nd Street, Suite 100

Bloomington, Indiana 47401