

Dear Presbyters,

As of this morning, our province is now in an official State of Emergency on account of the present COVID-19, or CORONA virus outbreak. It is our hope that each of us would pause as often as we can, to give this incredible burden over to the Lord in prayer. As overwhelming as things may seem, it is not bigger than our God, and we are never outside of His sight.

The COVID-19 virus is different from previous outbreaks like SARS or the Norwalk virus in a variety of ways. Primarily, it can only be contracted through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is important to remember that a person does not need to display symptoms or be diagnosed in order to pass along the virus to others. Additionally, COVID-19 is of particular concern to adults over the age of 65 - especially those with compromised or weakened immune systems. Unfortunately, our multi-generational worship settings are an ideal environment for the contraction or transmission of the CORONA virus. With this information in hand, in combination with the recommendations from our provincial health authorities, the Business Committee strongly recommends that all Sessions within the Presbytery take the following actions, effective immediately:

No congregation within the Presbytery will meet as a whole church for worship until further notice.

All churches within the Presbytery suspend all gatherings until further notice.

Our calling to be a force for health in our communities puts us in a unique position in the midst of this crisis. The above mentioned measures are recommended in order to care for those in our church family that are at higher risk than others, while at the same time modelling community leadership by participating in the larger public health efforts to protect our neighbours as well.

Sessions are encouraged to stay in regular contact with one another in order to ensure that your congregation's responses are as up to date as possible. There are a variety of online meeting tools available that can make this easy to do. These types of tools can be used by your church to keep small group, prayer meetings and other gathering-type-ministries to carry on.

Remember, a Session can make decisions over email/messenger as long as there is consensus, all elders have been included and major debate is not required.

Regarding worship, a number of creative responses have been enacted across the Presbytery in order to provide opportunities for our congregations to continue coming before God in worship. Live-stream services, online messages, e-mail transcripts of sermons are but a few.

While making some of these options possible for your congregation may require upgrades that take time to put into place, there are some simple methods available - an easy way to do online worship is to use a smartphone and take a video then use the YouTube platform to share it with your congregation. An example of that is what our clerk did at St Paul's Burlington.

<https://youtu.be/ujfBUubGtA>

We would encourage you to share your creative responses with the Clerk, so that they can then be shared with the entire Presbytery.

Please keep in contact with each other, especially those who are more vulnerable. The needs

of our families will be varied during this season - ranging from meals or childcare to picking up prescriptions and personal hygiene needs. Some ideas being enacted around the Presbytery are the creation of "care plans" and "calling chains" that ensures that nobody is left alone in this time. From a missional perspective, these same safe practices can be applied to connecting with neighbours and extended family members.

Remind each other that we have a God who has and will continue to overcome fear, anxiety and panic. Jesus has and still does call us to care for each other. Let us, by our witness, be God's instruments to redeem and shine in this state of emergency.