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"...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love..."
Colossians 2.2 (NIV)

March 16, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I write this, the clock approaches midnight. I just had a phone call that the Ohio elections have been extended until June. Tomorrow the Church gym will sit silent filled with polling machines, signs and evidence of an election that will not happen on March 17.

In 19 hours, my Congregation Council will most likely vote to suspend our worship services.

The daycare sits silent, smelling of bleach.

The Baked Steak Dinner posters advertise a fundraising event that has been cancelled.

I have members recovering from Influenza A and B. One is in a hospital that I can no longer visit. Members in the care center, just steps from our church door, long for a visit from a loved one, but their doors are "barricaded" trying to keep them safe.

Our Narthex is filled with food to help feed our village students who are on free/reduced lunch while the schools are closed indefinitely.

Our congregation is located in a small Ohio village of 1100 residents. We are farmers, teachers, parents and children. Some still studying. Some retired. Some trying to figure out if they have a place of employment that will be open tomorrow or how they will pay the bills and feed their family.

I do not know what tomorrow holds since it seems to change moment to moment as evidenced by today's briefings when the Ohio governor said to limit exposure to groups under 50 (that works for my small congregation). The CDC recommended no more than 15. The President said 10.

I must admit, I have felt helpless. I do not have answers or eloquent words. What I do have is faith and the assurance that God is with us wherever we are. I know that we will continue to proclaim God's love in word and deed. I have no doubt that we will continue to be the church together albeit in new and creative ways. I believe this too will pass and that we will grow stronger, hopefully kinder and more aware of our neighbor.

And I pray. I pray for our parishes that are trying to stay faithful to God while protecting their beloved children of God. I pray for our government leaders as they struggle to stay one step ahead. I pray for our medical staff who do not have enough supplies or space for the projected needs yet continue to care for the sick. I pray for our bishops and rostered leaders. I pray for my daughters as their lives are very different than two weeks ago. I pray for my friend's child who is quarantined and her fiancé who tested positive. I pray for you, my siblings, for your spirits, your ministries and your families.

I do not have answers or eloquent words. But I offer you encouragement. We, as a church, have so many amazing resources that you do not have to reinvent the wheel. Let me encourage you to share those resources. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself a break. Spend your time making phone calls and writing notes. Spend time tending your own soul as we look forward to the resurrection that will happen whether we are in building decked out in flowers and finery or sitting in our homes. Be kind to yourself because these are times unlike any for which seminary or even life itself has prepared us.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:17 NRSV

The message of the cross may be foolishness to some. But for us, it is the power of God. So, proclaim that boldly. Cling to promise that we are not alone. Reach out to those who are in need of a word of hope. Reach out when you are feeling overwhelmed or confused or frightened. Be the non-anxious presence our world so desperately needs. Live in the covenant of your baptism. Visit the Network's Facebook group and share your favorite resources so that others might use them to minister to their people. Did I mention, be kind to yourself?

We, as the Christian Education Network will continue to provide resources. Please feel free to share so that we may share with others. If there is any way we might support you, pray with you or offer a few moments to grieve, vent or hope, please reach out. And may I encourage you to find sabbath time unlike any you have had before.

Blessings and peace on this journey,

Juli Lejman-Guy, President, Pastor, Mom, Child of God