

ON RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old.”
Lamentations 5:20-21

From the moment of Creation to today’s unprecedented pandemic known as COVID-19, God has called the church to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh. In this time of global catastrophe, the church must rise to answer the call, offering its life as witness in word and work, heart and hand, in prayer and practice for the healing of the world God so loves.

This is not an initiative for new action or a reordering of priorities. Doing the ministry and mission of Christ is what the church is already about. Rather, this moment requires a response from the church to a world drowning in a great flood of suffering, fear, deprivation, abandonment, and death, compounded by the pandemic. The challenge before us is not so much about adjusting to a *new normal* in the days ahead, but how we will continue to grow as *new humans* in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the context of a destructive virus, how will we say and show the great ends of the church? We must declare ourselves to be a community of faith, of hope, of love and reconciliation, of Gospel witness. (F-1.03)

To that end we affirm that:

- In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are guided both by the evidence of science and our deepest values as a people of faith.
- We seek compassion and justice for the most vulnerable among us, especially those who have been further marginalized by the pandemic—older persons, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), immigrant communities, impoverished and working poor persons, homeless persons and those for whom home offers no safety, those who are ill, afflicted, or challenged in body, mind, and spirit, and all whose lives are threatened because of harmful social structures and discrimination, which have been made even more apparent during the COVID-19 outbreak. We repent of the role we have played in these injustices.
- We pray for hope, courage, and wisdom on behalf of children and youth who must now move forward into a future where dreams, stability, and the social fabric have been radically altered. We commit to dismantling disparities in education, and in access to nutrition, technology, and necessary resources.
- With gratitude, we support and advocate safety for those who cannot avoid risks, such as hospital and health care staff, public safety employees, grocery workers, funeral home employees and so many others whose lives and well-being are just as essential as their jobs.
- We pray for and seek help for all those facing economic hardship and loss of livelihood.
- We advocate for access to good medical care for all who are in need, and for opportunities to earn a living and have fair wages.
- We desire wisdom for world leaders, and for our national, state, and local leaders, who are called upon not only to develop effective responses to this medical and economic cataclysm, but to provide a sense of comfort and hope for all those enduring fear and loss at this time. We share a special concern for the plight of nations that already struggle with high levels of poverty, inequality, and exploitation of their resources.

- We mourn with those who mourn the loss of precious lives, for the disruption of human relationships, and for those who suffer the pain of isolation.
- As we continue the gospel journey into all the world, we urge prayer and care for neighbors near and far so that all may be accorded respect as those created in the image of God.
- We invite congregations and worshipping communities to come to a larger, wider, rounder table, prepared for us by Christ alone, to imagine creative ways to celebrate our life together with our Triune God, whose presence has never been dependent on physical buildings or human timetables.
- We thank God for all those who labored faithfully on overtures and reports dealing with critical social and theological issues that were scheduled for this 224th General Assembly (2020), and we lament the delay in addressing these profound challenges. We invite the church to join in ongoing study and discussion of these heartfelt, faithful matters.
- We unite in prayer for pastors and church staffs, congregations, seminaries, teachers, mission co-workers, mission agency personnel, evangelists, champions of justice, for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and for the church in the world, that the Spirit will be upon all and sustain them as they carry out the work to which they have been called.
- We call on our whole church to commit to continuous discernment of how to meet the social justice, economic, and spiritual challenges of the pandemic. We set aside Sunday, October 25, 2020, Reformation Sunday, as a day of prayer for responding to those challenges.

As different parts of the church respond to the pandemic according to their gifts, may we bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. We hold fast to the everlasting love of God in Christ that has sustained us through the ages, through war, famine, slavery, persecutions, and pestilence, with the sure and certain hope that God will never forsake us. We stand on God's holy word: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with HOPE." -Jeremiah 29:11