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**A Statement of the Presbytery Council to the Presbytery of Lake Huron
April 27, 2020**

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” - 1 Peter 1:3

Friends,

In this season of distancing and quarantine, the words of Peter still ring true. Christ is risen, and we are born anew into living hope and an inheritance that is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” – that is, that nothing on earth, not even a pandemic, can diminish.

We have seen this invincible hope triumph in many ways during these past weeks: in scores of families in our churches and communities served by our food pantries; in the hundreds of protective masks sewn and distributed by our members; in the new and creative ways many of our congregations have found to proclaim the good news and to connect with one another; and in the spirit of collaboration that has forged new partnerships for worship and service.

We have also witnessed acts of quiet heroism: in our members serving as health-care professionals, first-responders, and essential workers who risk exposure in service to others; in pastors who care for grieving families, or who continue to serve while caring for their own afflicted loved-ones; in those who write notes of encouragement or make phone calls to isolated, lonely, or anxious members; and in countless other acts of faithful service, often unseen and unacknowledged.

In all these ways, we share the love of Christ, bear witness to the gospel, and affirm, even in our trials, that Christ is indeed risen. All our churches, large and small, are to be applauded for their faithful responses.

“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’” – Acts 1:6

The question of the disciples to the risen Christ after forty days of “sheltering in place” might sound familiar. Is it time yet? Will we be restored to our former glory? As this initial wave of the pandemic appears to be cresting and even receding in our state, we are faced with another challenge: how and when do we begin to reopen our churches, and when we do, can we return to our familiar patterns of gathering, worshiping, and serving?

As it was with the disciples, the answers we receive may not be ones we expect or want to hear. We can no more go back to the way things were than we can turn back the clock and undo the impact of this pandemic on our lives and our world. Nor would we want to undo the many ways we have grown and changed through the challenges we face. We will come back together in face-to-face gatherings – as changed people and churches. Like those disciples at Pentecost, what we will experience will not be a “new normal” but an ongoing transformation of Christ’s church in a changing world. And as the gift of the Holy Spirit transformed the disciples into apostles, so God will also empower and send us forth in new ways to bring the gospel to the world.

But first, we must wait for the right time. Previously, we encouraged all churches to suspend face-to-face gatherings until May 10. On April 24, the governor extended the shelter-at-home directive until May 15 and promised that the reopening of our state will not take place all at once. Rather, it will be a gradual process on a timeline based on numerous factors. Resumption of public gatherings will almost certainly be limited and involve some form of physical distancing. As happened in previous pandemics, a premature resumption of pre-pandemic social interaction endangers the life and health of our members and risks causing a new spike of infections that can be worse than the first.

Therefore, the Presbytery Council urges our congregations:

- To continue to observe the directives of state and local authorities regarding personal activity and public assemblies as an act of loving our neighbors by promoting public health and safety.
- To **continue to suspend face-to-face gatherings through May 30**, resuming in-person worship on Pentecost Sunday, May 31, with limited numbers of participants under carefully observed protocols should circumstances permit.
- To use the month of May to prepare your congregations and gathering places for safe meetings, observing protocols provided by the presbytery and civil authorities for such meetings. Preliminary guidance including such protocols is attached to this letter and can be found on the Presbytery website coronavirus response page.

The Presbytery Office will continue to function via telecommuting until the shelter-at-home directive is lifted. Staff will continue to respond to your requests and inquiries via email and phone. Presbytery meetings will continue to meet electronically via Zoom until further notice. Plans are underway to conduct our **June 2 Presbytery meeting** electronically. Please read carefully the call for the meeting when it is issued.

Some of our congregations are experiencing significant financial distress during this period. Some have taken advantage of Presbytery grants and loans in addition to or in place of federal small business assistance and relief from the Board of Pensions. Due to the prolonged period of disruption of face-to-face gatherings, the Presbytery will be **increasing limits on grants and loans** from \$2,000 each to \$4,000 each. The same repayment terms for loans will apply. Congregations that have already received grants and loans may reapply. An updated application form will be posted on the Presbytery website.

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you” – 1 Peter 5:10

The challenges we are experiencing are minor compared to those faced by the early church, or even by many in our world today. As Peter counseled the persecuted believers of his day, God is in control and promises that as we face our challenges with patience and faith, God will restore, support, strengthen, and establish us for the work we have been called to do.

In Christ’s Service,

The Presbytery Council

TE Lindsey Carnes, Moderator

RE Adam Engel, Vice Moderator

TE Philomena Ofori-Nipaah, PLH Mod.

RE Linda Langrill, PLH Vice Mod.

TE Bob Emrich

TE Katja Gruening

RE Janie Gugino

TE Andrew Miller

RE Delphine Moore

TE Joseph Novak

TE Jim Offrink