

CPMC Conference Ministers and Congregational Pastors

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

Susan Janzen opened the meeting by having everyone take a few deep breaths and then she offered a prayer for the time together. She read from an “In the Meantime” blog by David Lose, who wrote that Pentecost will be different this year and any decisions made will be tainted by politics. All congregations are different and will come to different decisions based on different data. But we are united by Christ, by our shared need and by God’s abundance of grace. The same Spirit that worked in the New Testament disciples is working in and through us now.

Susan opened the meeting for pastors to share their experiences of the reopening process for their congregations:

- Some churches are re-opening without having a serious discussion on “what is the church in the midst of the coronavirus?” which is frustrating. Others are forming re-opening committees to have such conversations and guide the process.
- Some are using proclamations by their governor as a guide. For example, Iowa’s governor stated that the state is still in a crisis situation and that those who have underlying conditions or are over the age of 65 should be sheltering in place and not going out or mingling in crowds.
- Some churches have already resumed meeting in person, taking into account social distancing and other protective measures. A few pastors have made some in-person pastoral visits while wearing masks and trying to maintain social distancing (with some exceptions).
- Some churches don’t have access to reliable internet (or parishioners who don’t use computers) so have been printing worship services and hand-delivering them to some—which has the side benefit of being a pastoral visit.
- Several churches have Sunday school classes and small groups who have met online; also committee and board meetings; other Sunday school classes have made a point to phone one another.
- Some pastors raised the concern that people seem tired of meeting online and may drift away if in-person worship doesn’t resume soon.
- One pastor cited a paper by the Barna Group that said 48% of churchgoers have not viewed an online service since churches were closed to the public. Of the remaining 52%, many did not watch their own church broadcasts. So, Susan asked the group what percentage of parishioners are watching their services. Most feel their percentages are much above this (up to 85% of members, along with people who live at a distance and others who watch later via YouTube). One participant noted a 50% increase in attendance at their church’s annual meeting, including many parents of young children who couldn’t usually participate.
- Some pastors are wondering, “What if the pastor disagrees with the decision of the church to reopen?” It could be that a pastor’s spouse works with vulnerable populations and so returning to in-person church activities might mean a need for self-isolation to avoid cross-contaminate. Or perhaps the pastor has a compromised immune system and

can't risk exposure. Pastors shared stories from their own experiences, and also offered support to one another as we, and our congregations, find our way through this together.

- Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit is crucial at all times, but especially now when it seems every action (or lack of action) has political ramifications and the decisions we make may have life-and-death implications.

Susan reminded the pastors of the many resources on the CPMC website to help with these sensitive discussions and raised some additional things to consider: Pastors are mandatory reporters, and this may include knowledge of someone with an infectious disease (we know this is true in Minnesota and likely elsewhere). If so, are we ready to let people know that we will be contacting the health department if someone tells us they have tested positive for the coronavirus? Are we equipped to keep track of who attends worship and other events for contact tracing purposes?

This part of the conversation ended with an acknowledgment that everyone can pray and discern and come to different conclusions, and a reminder that virtual meeting is still real church.

Lyle Miller of Everence noted that this is a prime time to have “the talk” about end of life issues/wishes. Talk to your families and to your congregants who need to have these discussions. This disease can move swiftly and leave no time for communicating end-of-life wishes. Lyle is available to facilitate these conversations if pastors would like to contact him. There is a wealth of resources on the Everence website to help guide these conversations.

On the topic of **CPMC Annual Meeting** coming up on June 20:

- Register soon!
- June 21 is “Conference Sunday” and there will be worship resources available and churches are encouraged to celebrate communion on that Sunday, by whatever means you are able to do so.
- We will be voting on the Income and Spending Blueprint, voting on the Slate and discussing a clarification to the Bylaws. These are routine matters for the AM
- We will be installing a new Executive Conference Minister, Nathan Luitjens. This is a cause for celebration!
- The Youth will have a Zoom session of their own on Friday evening which will include the major elements of their regular time together: Orientation to the work of Annual Meeting, a meeting with conference leadership and, of course, games!
- It was noted that spouses may share an email address to receive the invitation to attend the Zoom meeting, but that *each individual should have their own device*. Everyone will be assigned to a “table”/Zoom room for table discussion and spouses will be assigned to different “tables”/Zoom rooms. Also, this need for each person to have their own device will be something to consider for groups that may have wanted to meet together in churches for the Annual Meeting. Can the church bandwidth support so many connections? It may be better for everyone to join the meeting from their home.

Susan said that this meeting of pastors will take place next week (June 3) and that after that, it may go to an every-other-week format (with a specific topic of discussion). She'd be available

for more informal interaction on the off weeks. She wants this time to be helpful and not burdensome for the pastors.

Amanda hasn't made a decision yet regarding the afternoon Christian Formation meetings but will likely continue to have "open office hours" on Wednesday afternoons.

Susan closed the meeting with prayer.