

UPDATED MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PALMER

Greetings in Christ Jesus:

Thanks again for all the ways that you are responding and rallying and to glorify God, proclaiming the Gospel in new ways and sustaining the ways you serve your neighbors. You continue in my daily prayers. I can truly claim the words of the Apostle Paul in *Philippians 1:3-4*: *"I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it's always a prayer full of joy."*

I know that for many this week and next may prove a unique challenge as we will not gather in ways we had expected to especially during Holy Week and Easter. On the other hand, I thrill to the reports of the creative and safe ways you are embodying Easter. If Easter is about the power of life, please know that as you discipline yourselves to physical distancing for a season, you are participating in a life giving behavior that is thoroughly consonant with the spirit and power of resurrection and Easter.

That said, after careful review of the latest direction of our federal and state government and conversation with a number of persons across the conference, **I believe it is wise to extend my strong encouragement to not hold public worship throughout the month of April.** After Easter Sunday, we'll see where things stand in our progress to "flatten of the curve" and share with you our best guidance. Thanks for receiving this unwelcome word in the spirit that it is intended.

As each day passes, there are inquiries about Clergy Session and Annual Conference. After consultation with key leadership of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the Office of Ministry, I do not plan to convene a mid-May face-to-face Clergy Session. Other options are under consideration with the pivotal decision being connected to the when of the Annual Conference.

A decision about the regularly scheduled session of the West Ohio Annual Conference in early June is pending. There are a number of moving parts and considerations. But consultation of the best direction is under way, is robust and collaborative. May 1 is the agreed upon date to notify Lakeside of our intentions unless they should initiate something sooner based their needs and on available data. My hope is that we will be able to announce a decision considerably before May 1.

As I have often conveyed to you in word and I hope deed, we already have everything we need to take the next faithful step. That does not mean we can see as clearly as we want to the end of the road. But not being able to see the end of the road is not an excuse to not take the next faithful step that is before us. In these crisis ridden and panic laden days the opportunity to live as people of faith is as poignant as I can recall experiencing. So I turn to the hymn tradition of the church and leave you with this:

*O for a faith that will not shrink
Tho' pressed by many a foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of any earthly woe*

Yours in Christ Jesus,

+ Gregory V. Palmer

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