

Greetings Sister and Brothers in the Faith and in the Partnership of the Gospel:

I am incredibly grateful for how each of you has embraced the mantle of leadership during these uncertain and challenging days. You have honored your ordination vow to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love in more ways than can be counted. And the efforts of each congregation and their leaders to be faithful have not gone unnoticed nor are they unappreciated.

As you know, we now find ourselves seeking how to take the next steps in our collective journeys as congregations and as leaders. Those next steps will not look the same for every congregation...and yet each congregation is called to be faithful in the context in which they live and serve and have their being.

Remembering that Trinity Sunday is on the horizon, I am mindful that the apostle closes his second letter to the Corinthians with these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (II Corinthians 13:13)” Those words are a blessing and a benediction upon our people and upon our communities. But they are also a challenge for the decisions each congregation is called to make. Decisions are to be filled with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who considered it important to seek and serve the least, the last, and the lost. Decisions are to be filled with the love of God, who was willing to sacrifice what was dear in order to bring all into the embrace of that love. Decisions are to be filled with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who came when the people were of one accord in prayer, and then aided the people to discover and live into the next steps of faithfulness.

I would also call us to remember that as Presbyterians, we have historic principles which have guided us through every decision, large and small, since 1788:

- “That God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship.”
- “Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters thar respect religion, as universal and inalienable. We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.”

This is certainly a time to remember that each of us, as leaders within the larger Church, are answerable to God through our consciences as they are guided by the Word of God. We are also called to claim that the guidance of civil government is separate from the governance of the Church, but that the two can be partners when it comes to matters of protection and security in discernment and decisions that need to be equal and common to all others, both within the Church and beyond the Church.

The Presbytery of Whitewater Valley encourages every Session of every congregation to be guided both by God's Word and by the historic principles of our polity. And as you make decisions about what is next, we offer you these links for consideration. Some are from within the Church and some come from government agencies. But all of them offer ways for us to move forward as we seek to serve God and the people of God in the uncertain days to come.

[https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/covid-19/beginning-conversations-for-re-entry.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/beginning-conversations-for-re-entry.pdf)

[https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning\\_to\\_public\\_worship\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/covid-19/returning_to_public_worship_may_2020.pdf)

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[https://www.in.gov/gov/files/Executive%20Order%2020-28%20\(Reopen%20Stage3\).pdf](https://www.in.gov/gov/files/Executive%20Order%2020-28%20(Reopen%20Stage3).pdf)

[https://backontrack.in.gov/files/BackOnTrack-IN\\_PlacesOfWorship.pdf](https://backontrack.in.gov/files/BackOnTrack-IN_PlacesOfWorship.pdf)

If I can assist you and your leadership in the work of discernment, I hope that you will feel free to call upon me.

With gratitude and with prayers,

Alan Thames, Executive Presbyter

Whitewater Valley Presbytery