



Spring arrived while we have been staying in place. These delicate daffodils herald life despite the cold, despite the winter, despite any darkness or death we might find ourselves mired in. The whole world needs this good news now. Their lament is sunshine and for that I am grateful. Enjoy a shorter newsletter this week but know that there is so much more to pray for than is listed here and so much more service to bear witness to in the coming days.

Peace to you all,

Rachel Matthews, Temporary Mission Coordinator

First Presbyterian Church Champaign

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS):

Every year at Easter First Presbyterian Church Champaign receives the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering. You might remember this one as the one where children collect money in the fish banks which are collected on Sunday Morning. Of course, all people can participate in this offering. If you have been collecting money in your fish banks, since we cannot share our offering in church, you can put the coins in a plastic bag and put them in the mail slot in the church during the week. Watch the following video on the One Great Hour of Sharing:

<https://vimeo.com/320337801>

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is part of the OGHS offering. Hear what PDA is doing during the COVID-19 Crisis:

Dearly Beloveds

When did we see you?

In company with the whole church—its congregations, pastors and chaplains, mid councils, and national staff, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) has entered this strange new world of pandemic, beginning our response to COVID-19 with a solidarity grant to our ACT Alliance partner in China in February, to support their local response. As the virus began to spread, PDA prepared and offered guidance to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations for safe practices in the event of a widespread contagious disease outbreak, an outbreak which has now reached the level of pandemic.

A pandemic is, in our lifetimes, an almost unprecedented kind of disaster. In its breadth, it surpasses the flu pandemic in 1968. In its scope, range, and potential for mortality, its nearest and most sobering parallel is the HIV/AIDS pandemic that began in the mid 1970's and only achieved effective treatment in 2012. It is clearer, day by day, that COVID-19 affects all of us. It requires attention, a commitment of resources, a duty of care, and a dedication to the common good from all of us. Even as a sense of vulnerability begins to affect some of us for perhaps the first time, make no mistake, it makes those who are already vulnerable, more so. So even as we live into the realities of what it means to respond to a disaster with universal impact, we put first our commitment to see, listen deeply to, and support the most vulnerable in our midst. This is in keeping with Christ's invitation in Matthew 25, that whenever we respond to those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, unhomed, imprisoned, or sick, we respond to the needs of Jesus. And there is a peculiar grace in the fact that, because of pandemic, none among us can now say, *when did we see you?* It is, quite literally, impossible for us not to see.

What is Presbyterian Disaster Assistance doing now?

PDA is drawing 2.7 million dollars from reserves to seed the COVID-19 ongoing response both in the United States and internationally. These are funds that have been given by donors to [PDA's general fund](#), meant to meet the response needs of disasters small or large that are not able to be funded by special appeals. Although money is not the only thing communities need in this moment, it is one resource, alongside many others, that can be helpful. We are incredibly grateful to donors, past and continuing, who trusted PDA enough to designate their funds to the [PDA general disaster account](#). This is where the bulk of our reserve for COVID-19 is being drawn from. We are also incredibly grateful to the churches and individuals who support [One Great Hour of Sharing](#), the church-wide offering collected during Easter, which not only provides our core funding, but also supports two sibling programs, the [Presbyterian Hunger Program](#) and [Self Development of People](#), two programs whose work in addressing systemic poverty, hunger and centering the needs of communities historically marginalized is as critical in the face of COVID-19 as it is to our global human flourishing every day. Churches and communities wishing to think about how best to allocate mission resources during this pandemic can gain insight and support from any and all of us.

In addition to making these grant funds available, PDA is ramping up our Emotional and Spiritual Care programs, including Compassion Fatigue and Resiliency workshops, and we will be making them broadly available. We are working with the [Mental Health Ministries](#) office and the community Mental Health Network established after our last General Assembly. We will also work with Stony Point Center in New York, looking toward some virtual and (in time) actual gatherings for pastoral respite and reflection.

This is a beginning. We realize that two and a half million dollars is not a great deal of money when spread over the needs of partners at home and all over the world. And we realize that fundraising efforts now for COVID-19, and in general for the ongoing work of disaster response—the floods, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes and mass violence events that continue to occur with indifference to the impact of COVID-19—is going to be challenging as all economic systems are affected at present. We respect the challenges especially of our churches and mid councils as they continue to serve and in some cases, work to survive.

We want to assure you that the commitments PDA has made to ongoing disaster responses will continue to be met; and we will continue to respond to new disasters as they occur, to the best of our ability. Our wonderful National Response Team, though physically grounded, will [“virtually deploy”](#) in support of mid councils and congregations when disaster strikes. Volunteer work teams and the host sites that support them—more than forty of them across the U.S. and Puerto Rico presently—are also on hold—but teams are already looking to reschedule, because the mission of Christ’s church continues and God’s people deeply want to be connected in these essential ways, that support the healing and rebuilding of neighbors. How sweet it will be when we can resume face to face caring for one another...and how much we will learn, as we practice being together in different ways.

The core commitments of our General Assembly’s [Matthew 25 invitation](#) are helpful ways for us to center our awareness, and focus our response efforts. Mindful of our church’s commitment to the end of systemic poverty, we focus our resources and our deepest attention on those who are most vulnerable: lacking food security, adequate shelter, access to clean water and the means to practice the hygiene that is so important in fighting COVID-19’s spread. This community of the vulnerable includes the many refugees, asylum seekers, and people on the move or displaced; here in the United States and globally. They deserve our best efforts and our full-throated advocacy. Embracing our Matthew 25 call to fight to eradicate structural racism, we are listening carefully to our colleagues of color, and those who lead ministries among our Asian, African-American, Native American and Latinx congregations. We will be prioritizing the grant requests which help address critical needs in historically marginalized and excluded communities. We particularly want to lift up the advocacy efforts and echo the voices that urge us to be clear and strong in repudiating the hateful racist actions and expressions that have targeted siblings of Asian descent during this pandemic.

The experience and training that more localized disasters has provided to the church will serve all of us well in this moment. The principles of response are the same: Work as a community. Share resources. Let everyone do their own part—knowing that not everyone has to do everything. Don’t be reactive, which is rooted in fear and in our perception of threat. but be responsive. Keep breathing deeply, and relax your body. Listen, Assess and Respond, then repeat. A Kenyan colleague used to remind me: if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. This is not a sprint, but a long walk toward a destination we can not yet see. Together we are showing up now, for the short term and will remain in the work for as long as it takes, so that we can arrive together. We are, as the hymn reminds us, walking in the light of God.

In the Light,

the Rev. Dr. Laurie Kraus, Director, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Presbyterian Mission Agency

Our prayers go out to our mission coworkers this week:

Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta (Indonesia) - Currently in Indonesia

Mark Adams and Miriam Maidonado Escobar (Mexico) - Currently in Douglas, AZ.

Jeff and Christi Boyd (Central Africa) - Currently in Kinshasa.

Bob and Kristi Rice (South Sudan) currently in the United States.

Jo Ella Holman (Caribbean) and (Cuba Partner Network) currently in the Caribbean. We pray for the Cuba people who have reported 320 cases of COVID-19 as of Sunday, April 5.

In a recent meditation (April 2, 2020), mission coworker [David Cortes-Fuentes, formerly at the Matanzas seminary in Cuba, writes](#), “Today, as in every crisis moment, we need people with character and integrity, with intelligence and imagination, with dedication and commitment, to be willing to be leaders, even at the cost of their personal prestige and gain. We need truthful leaders, we need leaders that pay attention to educated people, that may be examples of common sense, intelligent decisions, and of compassion. Again, we need to look at the horizon with discernment, determination and with bravery. Maybe it is because of this that we have the opportunity of being witnesses, agents, and participants in this crisis moment.

In spite of the dark and turbulent horizon, I cannot and I do not want to surrender to the bad news. On the contrary, I firmly believe the Good News that after the darkness of Good Friday, the luminous reality of Resurrection Sunday is a sure fact. Jesus himself has been our model. In place of reducing himself to complain about the disgrace of the one who fell into the thieves’ hands, Jesus invites us to have compassion like the Samaritan, that extended his helping and restoring hand to the half-dead wounded. I believe in the Gospel (the Good News) that this crisis is not the last word of our existence. On the contrary, like the prophets and heroes and heroines of the Biblical story, we can persevere as though we see the Invisible One (Heb 11:27).

Christians have the call and the opportunity to shine in the midst of this darkness. The Church has the responsibility to believe, to live, and to act in such a way that the whole world may glorify God as a result of our significant acts resulting in the wellbeing of others. The Church has the responsibility and the opportunity not to flirt with those that take advantage of the crisis for personal gain, but to be an example of solidarity, compassion, empathy and justice. If there is anything that comforts and strengthens me daily, is the remembrance of men, women, and youth in the churches in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and other places where I have had the opportunity to serve. Their faith and example have shown me that we can still celebrate and proclaim the Good News, not in comparison with the greater suffering of others, but by joining one another in the name of Christ, so that other people may not have to suffer any more.

David's words call us to "celebrate and proclaim the Good News...by joining one another in the name of Christ, so that other people may not have to suffer any more." It is a good message to take into Holy Week.

NEWS AROUND CHAMPAIGN URBANA

I want to highlight a few things this week.

CANTEEN RUN - Is asking for donations to be made to the Salvation Army with "Canteen Run" in the "For" space. Reminder that Canteen Run has a website for more information. <http://www.cucanteenrun.org/>

FAITH IN PLACE - April is a special month for those of us celebrating Earth Day. Please check out the Faith in Place website and the Earth Day events coming up.

Faith in Place | Faithful People Caring for the Earth

Earth Day Observance

Faith in Place will host a statewide Interfaith Vigil on Zoom Monday, April 13. We are also encouraging Green Teams to set up Zoom Vigils for their local networks on Earth Day (April 22) or another time of their choosing. Those will appear on our Event calendar as we collect information.

THE REFUGEE CENTER

This week I talked with Lisa Wilson, Executive Director of the Refugee Center. Despite all the lockdowns and travel restrictions, refugees still find their way here. Just 10 days ago the Refugee Center helped a family arrive here on a special visa. She shared with me how helpful the Forward 150 grant has been to them as it is this money that helps them provide the refugee family money for rent, deposits, and setting up a household. The cost to relocate can be thousands of dollars. Let us not forget how confusing and scary it is to come to a new country with a new language in ordinary times. This family is coming to this new country and immediately isolating. Let's pray that they find community and welcome.

SALT & LIGHT

I will leave this in for another week so we will remember to shop at Salt and Light first. Salt and Light has about 80% of what you may need for groceries at a good price and in an uncrowded environment. Shopping there helps to feed and employ those who lack food security.

Location is 1819 S. Philo Rd., Urbana. Hours are Monday to Saturday from 8:00–6:00. Elderly and other high risk shoppers have reserved time from 9:00–10:00. Sunday hours are 11:00 to 5:00.

Beginning March 21st and ending when restrictions are lifted:

- *Our Champaign location will remain closed,*
- *Our Urbana grocery store will be open with limited hours. Monday through Saturday 8am–6pm. Sunday 11am to 5pm.*
- *8am–10am shopping, Monday through Saturday, will be reserved for senior citizens and at-risk individuals.*
- *Donations of goods will be accepted Monday through Saturday, 8am to 6pm, at the back of our Urbana store. There are bins located outside for your convenience. Self serve only at this time. No donations of goods can be accepted inside the store.*
- *No outside volunteers.*
- *Computer lab will be closed.*

This is a critical time for our mission and for those we serve. You can help by bringing your donation of goods during the designated times above, shopping for groceries with us, and donating online at

<https://donate.onecause.com/saltandlight2020>.



Friends of Presbyterian Education Board in Pakistan

And, if any of you are making masks, listen to what our friends in Pakistan have been doing:

We celebrate the SHE/SHA project women who volunteered their time and resources to make and distribute 1000 face masks to people within their community. The director, Gulnaz Rauf, reminds us of what the SHE/SHA project is, part of the work of Presbyterian Education Board in Pakistan:

Our mission is to help all women and young females who are at risk, providing them and their children with safe and affordable housing.

Our shelter home aims to support and empower homeless women, young females and their children by providing shelter for 4 to 6 months. With the efforts of the entire project staff, we try to rehabilitate the families by counseling and advocacy. We

also help them in solving their problems related to legal aid and legal matters.

Homeless women and children should be treated with sympathy and dignity. They have a right to safety, security and confidentiality.

“We think sometimes poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless, the poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty” (Mother Teresa).

Let's all praise God and thank him for all of his blessings.



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 W. Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820
217-356-7238
info@firstpres.church