

16th of March, 2020

To: All Ministers of Congregations, Vacancy Conveners, Stated Supplies, those in Specified Ministries, and Clerks of Presbytery.

Dear Colleague,

These are deeply uncertain times. Each occasion we turn to the news we are reminded of the seriousness of the events unfolding around us. Even beyond the immediate, where as a first priority we think of the people who are vulnerable, we see the wider turmoil in terms of economic uncertainty including the chaos of the financial markets. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues daily to grow in severity, we sense fear is growing. It is, of course normal to experience anxiety.

Our churches have a special witness even in such times as this, pointing to a confidence in Jesus who holds everything in his hands. As pastors we continue to have a unique role in our communities in demonstrating courage and a compassion that is essential at this time. All this is not without its stresses and strains as we strive to give leadership to our people and display Christ's love. God is faithful and we will still keep our gaze upon him (Psalm 27 v4-5), being assured he will keep us safe.

All through this year, I have been encouraging our people to understand my theme, "Enjoying God", as an opportunity to demonstrate practical faith in action, letting the world see the fruit of the Spirit through our daily living. Even here today in simple ways we can expound the Gospel. So, when government guidance is that we should avoid physical touch, we can still seek to avoid isolation and loneliness by creatively keeping in contact with others including the most vulnerable - seeking to forget no one.

First and foremost we can pray, remembering that our God is sovereign over all the events of life. This weekend our denomination's "Let's Pray" guide will focus on the immediate needs of this crisis, and I encourage you to make this resource available to your congregations. This is a good time to invite your folk to sign up for this regular prayer email. I would also ask that you let your people know of online opportunities where your own service is not broadcast. Over the next few weeks more resources will be added to the PCI website which can aid personal worship.

Practically we will need to follow the relevant government guidance as to what is permitted as time progresses, and keep up to date with any changes. Part of our calling is to enable people to encounter the living God so, while some of our gatherings may already be cancelled, we should think creatively about how

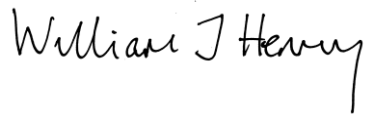
to care for the people God has entrusted to us. This might include finding space to pray and worship perhaps in smaller settings than normal.

Some congregations have listed a contact phone number or email which members who are self-isolating may use to keep in touch and for practical help. This may be something you wish to consider.

*“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.”
Psalm 27v5*

In all that you do, especially at this critical time, may you continue to know the strength and blessing of the One we serve.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William J Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

WJ HENRY
MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY