

Dear Oxford Presbyterian Church family,

Over the last two weeks the leadership of OPC has been diligently at work making plans to maintain a semblance of normalcy in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This has involved a review and implementation of expanded cleaning and food service practices, a plan to adjust our worship gatherings in ways intended to limit the spread of virus, communication with our community partners, coordination with the Oxford Community Preschool, and a near endless stream of conference calls and email exchanges with other churches, health organizations, and higher councils of the church as we sought to learn the best practices for fighting this virus and keeping our community safe.

Just last night, the session of OPC appointed a special commission to carry forward the response plan to COVID-19. This commission, much smaller than our session and composed of people with work experience in education, healthcare, and senior living, was empowered to make more immediate and urgent decisions than would be possible for such a large body. Its first act was this morning, when it adopted an OPC Pandemic Action plan (attached), modeled after the school district's four-phase (0-3) plan of response. In adopting the plan, we committed to mirror the school district in its phase adjustment, meaning when OASD moved to stricter policies, so would we.

This situation has developed so quickly that OASD moved from Phase 0 to 1 on Tuesday, from 1 to 2 on Thursday, and just a short time ago, from Phase 2 to 3. This means that the Oxford Area School District will be closed from March 16-29. **As our plan mirrors that of OASD, we have made the difficult decision of canceling worship on March 15 and 22 (the 29 will be determined closer to the day based on OASD's plans) closing the church office from the end of the workday today until March 30, and suspending all community and church groups from use of our facility during that time.**

A very gracious offer to professionally disinfect our entire facility came from parents of two preschool children just a few minutes ago. They will be arriving at our facility this afternoon to disinfect the entire premises at no charge to the church or preschool.

Our work now turns to ensuring continued connection and care, even if we are not physically present with one another. Already the office is at work in transitioning to a work-at-home model, and we are exploring various technologies for keeping OPC connected and in worship, even during our time apart. We ask for your patience, prayers, and continued financial support of this ministry as we adapt to the present reality. In addition, *please please please* make sure we have a reliable way to contact you, and an emergency contact in case we are unable to reach you.

These are indeed strange and trying times, but amid them, I am reminded of an almost equally strange and trying book from our Holy Scriptures, one of my favorites, the Book of Ecclesiastes. In the fourth

chapter, the Teacher writes, *"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

As we confront the challenge of these days, it would be downright foolish to attempt do so alone. We are capable of so very much when we cooperate, keep in touch, and support one another in prayer. While the circumstances are indeed scary, this is also an opportunity for us to grow in our support for one another. Now more than ever, we are called to be Christ's body, working harmoniously together for the sake of each member. Special thanks are due to all those who have already given so much in the last several days, including the members of the Session, our Clerk Barb Baily, Ila Barlow, our faith community nurse June Hoffman, our sexton Clyde Prigg, our office administrators Eryn Gallagher and Lorraine Holton, and our preschool director Nicole Hartman, in addition to countless others. Our presbytery staff members (Erin, Michael, and Chrissy) have been incredible in resourcing Donegal congregations, not only with information, but with a spiritual lifeline in difficult times. And all of you who have accompanied us and strengthened us through your prayers, have been a gift beyond measure. Thank you.

However great our communal work may be, it is only in the presence of God that our cord is formed of three strands. Amid our times of challenge, may we remember the Lord holds us in loving hands, and sustains us day to day.

I will be in touch again soon to update you on our plans.

May God bless you all and feel free to reach out by phone or email to check in.

Faithfully,

Scott

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Rev. Scott Szabo

Pastor - Oxford Presbyterian Church

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