



Artwork by Virginia Scazzari

First Presbyterian Church

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Dear Members and Friends of the First Presbyterian Church of Cranbury,

It has been a dizzying week trying to keep up with the latest regarding COVID-19/the Coronavirus. The church staff, elders and I have oscillated all week as to how to best handle our life together as a church family. I am sure you are feeling overwhelmed too.

Everyone's deepest concern is the care of our congregation and community, especially the most vulnerable. We have been in prayer daily. I have done deep and extensive research and have been in conversation with medical professionals, other pastors, and denominational leaders. It is clear to me that the most effective way for us to protect ourselves and our community from spreading COVID-19 is for all of us to refrain from large gatherings for the next few weeks.

Therefore, as per Session action, **we are suspending in person worship and all church events and meetings, as well as closing our office and building, for two weeks.** This follows the action of many local schools and CPNS to close for two weeks. We will reevaluate at that point.

We are still a church, and we still have the work of the church to do even as our building closes. We will continue to be the Body of Christ through:

- **Worship.** There will continue to be ways for you to worship from home. You'll get an email later today with worship materials for tomorrow, and I will live stream a brief service from the sanctuary on our Facebook page tomorrow at 10:30 AM.
- **Giving.** Our faith is lived in grateful response to the freely given, unearned gift of God's love. Part of our response is to give our tithes and offerings to the life and ministry of the church. It is essential that you continue in your financial giving during this time. You can give online at www.cranburypres.org/give/, or mail in your gifts and pledges to the church office at 22 S Main St. Cranbury, NJ 08512.
- **Service.** Donations to Skeet's Food Pantry are more important than ever. Given the strain on grocery stores, Skeet's is unable to buy bulk like they usually do to stock their shelves beyond what is donated. Skeet's will distribute food in an alternative manner this Friday, and ongoing as there is need until they run out of food. Let's make sure they don't run out. If you're able to help volunteer at Skeet's this week, or as a driver for food deliveries going forward, please let me know.
- **Care.** We also have a list of everyone who does not get communications via email and Facebook. If you know of someone who should be on that list, please let me know so that I can make sure we haven't missed anyone. Isolation is difficult in the best of circumstances, and we do not want anyone to feel apart from their church family during this time. Aside from the calls Pastor Joanne and I will regularly make, I encourage you to check in on one another!
- **Pastoral Care.** Pastor Joanne and I are available by phone. We want to hear from you if you are struggling in any way, or just need someone to listen. The church office phone number is (609) 395-0897. We will be regularly checking the church voicemail.
- **Fellowship.** If you are on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/cranburypres) and have not yet "liked" our page—now is the time to do so. We will build community there. Check the page throughout the week and engage in conversation with one another there.
- **Learning:** We will send out a weekly Bible Study for adults and Sunday School resources for families. Just like the schools, our learning is going online!

- **Prayer.** It's time to grow your personal prayer life. I know many people are praying while washing their hands, that's a great idea. Find what works for you, and be in conversation with God daily. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the Prayer Chain list to receive ongoing prayer requests via email.

In all of this, we are trying to be faithful to our call to care for one another. We are trying to exercise responsibility for our health and for those with whom we are blessed to be in community. We will be more intentional about our life together in the coming weeks than we are when on "autopilot" and I am confident that with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance, this work will bear fruit.

It is OK to not be OK right now. It's also OK to grieve this decision. Many of us are struggling—there is the frustration of life put on hold, the fear of all that remains unknown, anxiety about all that is beyond our control, financial struggle, concern for loved ones and uncertainty about to do in regards to all of it. You are not alone, and your concern is already known to God. I remember the closing of Paul's letter to the Philippians (4:4-9):

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,

Pastor Hannah

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