

April 1, 2020

Peace Members and Friends,

The psalmist says, "My heart pounds in my chest because death's terrors have reached me. Fear and trembling have come upon me; I'm shaking all over. I say to myself, I wish I had wings like a dove! I'd fly away and rest. I'd run so far away! I'd live in the desert. I'd run to my hideout, far from the rushing wind and storm." Psalm 55:4-8 CEB.

Like the psalmist, many are experiencing pounding hearts, fear, and anxiousness. In addition, many are lonely due to the COVID-19 pandemic mandate from state and local governments to shelter in place. Like the psalmist, many wish this crisis would just go away or they could fly away and escape the pain. Indeed, we are truly living in uncertain times.

I pray you are heeding all the mandates to keep you safe and alive. I am concerned how you and your communities are navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many resources available to you to become knowledgeable and to keep safe. In addition to your state directives there is also important information at www.cdc.gov and www.Who.int. Since many of our churches are not gathering at their church buildings for worship, please <https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/> for resources to help you conduct alternative worship.

Per the mission and purpose of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, we are reminded in these perilous times that we are part of a community. Is your community fairing at its best in these times? I encourage you to stay connected to your community and remind them that we are all in this together.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, a PC(USA) organization, is providing information on emergency grants available to support congregations, presbytery partners, and trusted community partners. Priorities for the grants include:

- Immediate unmet needs of those at risk due to the impact of COVID-19, such as feeding, housing, and/or access to healthcare concerns
- Congregations and/or communities that have historically been marginalized
- The emergent or unmet needs of refugees, asylum seekers or other vulnerable immigrant populations due to the impact of COVID-19
- Congregations or partners at risk of suspending a vital service to vulnerable members of the community.

Access grant information at the following URL:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pda-ready-to-make-covid-19-grants-thanks-to-one-great-hour-of-sharing/>.

During times of crisis people of color communities are more severely impacted. Blacks represent 13% of the U.S. population and have suffered the most during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent article posted by *Race Forward* states that while we know that anyone can contract the virus, we also know that the impacts on communities of color could be severe. People of color are disproportionately likely to be in low-paying or hourly-wage jobs that make them unable to provide care or interrupt work. They are also more likely to have limited access to affordable healthcare, childcare, and transportation.

People of color are more likely to face unsafe conditions inside prisons, jails, and detention centers. Funding disparities in communities of color have led to hospital closures; shortages of frontline doctors and nurses; higher incidences of chronic conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease; housing overcrowding; and lack of quality elder care. These effects of structural racism have always been present and can have significant ramifications as we navigate through this public health crisis.

I have asked each board member, especially our region representatives, to follow-up with our local churches, chapters and synods to see how they are doing. What are the challenges? Where do they need support? How are they worshipping?

It is during times of tremendous challenge that we have seen how people of color experience a more severe impact than members of the majority population. I am asking you to post your responses to these questions on the NBPC website <http://www.nationalnbpc.org>. I am concerned that people of color are experiencing more racism and are more negatively impacted by a slowed down economy. Loss of jobs, inadequate health care, lack of food and shelter only to name a few. It is in these times that we, the NBPC, must witness to the PC(USA) to ensure that our members are not excluded from benefits and proper health care.

We are only as effective as our ability to speak truth to power. From what I have seen our friends of Asian descent are suffering from racist attacks. Some statements made by our leaders are racist and unacceptable. POTUS continues to call the coronavirus the "Chinese virus".

The Racial Equity Advocacy Committee responded to the racist language and marginalization of people of Asian descent as shared in the following link - <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/racial-equity-advocacy-committee-condemns-use-of-chinese-virus/>.

It is my hope that as we navigate our own fears and anxiety trust that God walks with us in every time of trial. It is my prayer that you are comforted by God's love and know God's peace. And remember we are unified by our mutual concern for our neighbors.

We have a tremendous opportunity to speak out and speak up to help our member congregations and communities. If we are silent, we fail to meet our mission and purpose. I look forward to receiving your letters, emails and reading your posts on the NBPC website. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me. Thank you for your time.

In God's Radical Hope that we love one another.

Blessings,
Thomas H. Priest, Jr.
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