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General Presbyter and Stated Clerk

May 22, 2020

To: Minister Members of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida and Clerks of Session
Subject: Decisions about Reopening Buildings and Resuming In-Person Worship

At our Presbytery Assembly a week ago, I took such delight in seeing your faces on my Zoom gallery view screen. I also was thrilled that at that Assembly we had well over 120 of you hold conversations in smaller groups about what it means to reopen church buildings and resume in-person worship. At that assembly, the Presbytery staff had the opportunity to do a presentation on the Guidelines for Conversation and the Report form used in creating your session's Plan for Reopening and Resuming. Those resources are posted on the presbytery website: <https://vibrantpresbytery.org/ministry-resources/>

Today I have received contacts that there are ones unsettled by the comments the President has made about reopening houses of worship. Politics aside, I would ask that we continue to be attentive to only the process which our polity envisions. I see that this way—we make careful, calculated, and cautious decisions based on the thorough conversation the session has undertaken after deep prayer. This guides our decisions about reopening our buildings.

We are not restaurants, nor are we retail stores. We are the church. We are not closed. Our churches have been wonderfully open. While our buildings have been closed, our churches have been beautifully open with new ways of worship, fellowship, prayer, and connection. We have made those decisions to not gather persons together out of love. We have acted in love and regard for our brothers and sisters out of a concern for safety.

On this Memorial Day weekend, I urge you to pray, worship on-line, make phone calls, send texts, share in gratitude for those who have given so much, and know that our participation in any panic or rush is the way of the world. Do not be dismayed, take a deep breath, and let us stay the course in being agents of love in our communities.

I am so heartened by the vibrant mission and ministries of all of our congregations. Your work in recent days, weeks, and even months has signaled a full-scale ability to shift, change, move, and accommodate in order to continue and flourish as the Church of Jesus Christ in the Presbytery of Tropical Florida. We are Vibrant Together!

Holding you in prayer and grateful for your ministry! *-Daris Bultena*

"Empowering Congregations to be Vibrant Christ-Centered Communities"