



APPALACHIAN MINISTRY NETWORK

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DATE: August 20, 2020
TO: Network Ministers and Churches
FROM: David Dillon
SUBJECT: Coronavirus and Fall Network Ministry Events Suspension

Just ten days ago I sent my last update to you concerning the network's ongoing navigation of the coronavirus crisis. At that time there had been four consecutive weeks with at least one church or minister being directly affected by the virus. Today, less than two weeks later, we stand at **six consecutive weeks** of reports of such developments. Last week another of our ministry family members tested positive (along with one of their children) and this week we were notified of a case in one of our smaller churches (in the Virginia portion of the network) that is causing the church to suspend in-person services for two weeks. As I said before, despite the virus' spread within our Appalachian Network fellowship, we are thankful to God that there have been no fatalities among the members of our spiritual community. Let us pray that continues to be so for the duration of this pandemic.

In my last correspondence I stated that, in addition to advising our congregations about safe ministry practices in this season of uncertainty, the network leadership team (executive officers and presbyters, section presbyters and departmental ministry leaders) has given serious consideration to the well-being of its members and adherents regarding events and meetings conducted by the network and its various ministries. Understandably, but regrettably, this has meant the cancellation of most of this year's network activities. As I have also said before, please know that **these decisions were not easy nor pleasant to make, and neither were they the desired course of action. Instead, they were made from an abundance of caution—not fear or a lack of faith, as some might allege, but for the welfare of our constituency attending network events.** (It should be noted here that local gatherings, such as church services, are entirely different from network meetings in the dynamics of attendees, group size, facilities, social distancing measures, activities, etc. Network events have a larger scope and scale of these issues, especially given the two-state make-up of our geographic territory.)

It is in this spirit that, due to the ongoing circumstances and uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the network presbytery acted this week to extend the current suspension of network ministry events through the end of 2020. Affected events include the rescheduled Virginia section council meetings and Network Conference, Light-for-the-Lost Tour, and Youth Convention. As announced previously, the PAUSE Ministers Retreat scheduled for September and Women's Retreat that was rescheduled from May to October, along with the Pastors Tour in October, had already been canceled. Also, the monthly school of ministry (AD-SOM) sessions have been held virtually since the pandemic began and will continue in that manner until able to resume in person once more.

Regarding the offices up for election on both the section and network levels, the presbytery's action includes the extension of those affected terms for another year until they may be considered by the appropriate bodies. Fortunately, none of the three executive offices (superintendent, assistant superintendent, and secretary-treasurer) were due for consideration at this year's Network Conference.

As disappointing as these decisions are, the upside is that they will make our future times together even more special and appreciated than normal. Sadly, we sometimes do not know the value of what we have and take for granted until it is lost. Be that as it may, we are in this **TOGETHER** as a ministry family, and with God's help and each other's prayers and encouragement, **WE WILL OVERCOME!**