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A version of this will appear in the next issue of *The Observer* which is now being prepared for printing and distribution.

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Dear Friends,

For me, the best word to describe my own experience is “disruptive.” My general flow of ministry tasks which is always highly connected to church visits, meeting with pastors and leaders, and other travel, has all come to a screeching halt, calling for major adjustments in terms of maintaining connections. Your IN/KY staff, all of us, are continuing to serve you by working from home for the short term at least, which brings its own challenges in terms of communication and connection. Personally, some travel plans and a long-anticipated meeting with a new friend are very likely to be put on hold. There’s a lot of disruption that has brought a level of stress and fatigue that feels a little unusual. The stark reality of being included in an “at risk” group simply because of my age, has been a rude awakening and disruptive, albeit somewhat humorous, if I am to be completely honest.

All of us are experiencing disruption and disorientation in our lives ***because what we expected life to be like this spring has been fundamentally altered.*** The end is not in sight and we don’t know if, and when, the restrictions being placed on us in terms of going about our formerly normal lives will be removed. Even when we are past the pandemic infection, do we really expect that life will be “normal” again?

Here are a few of my thoughts as we move through these next weeks and, quite possibly, months of life together in the midst of COVID-19 and its aftermath. These are offered in addition to the basics, such as following the necessary health protections that have been well stated elsewhere and paying attention to directives from reliable local, state, and national authorities.

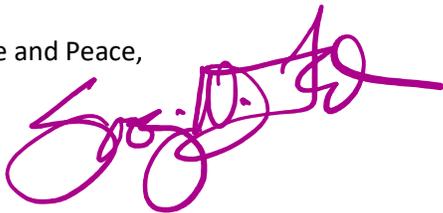
As stated in my letter last week, ***our first response as Christ followers is compassion and concern for others, supported by prayer and service*** which flow from scripture and our foundation of faith. Looking out for those who need assistance and finding ways to serve and assist them should come naturally to us, whether they are part of our family, our local congregation, or our wider community. This includes senior adults and those who are medically compromised, medical professionals and emergency responders who are feeling stretched beyond their limits, and children who depend on school meals for daily sustenance, to name a few. What about others, whose livelihood may be at risk due to lack of business, isolation, etc.; or those who live in fear of domestic violence and abuse? There is no shortage of people around us who need extra care and assistance during this time.

Secondly, **let's not succumb to fear and panic.** While those responses are normal for many people in a situation that feels out of control, as Christ followers' our trust is in The One who faced, endured and conquered death on our behalf, and who has, ultimately, prepared us to "...endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father..." (Colossians 1:11-12).

Third, the church is the body of Christ (not a building) who, collectively, name Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Coming together for worship, instruction and study, for support and encouragement, they are then sent out as a transformed people to serve in the world. **While the gathering together is important and even, I would argue, crucial (during "normal" times), the purpose in our gathering together is to prepare us to serve in the world well beyond the buildings and spaces in which we gather.** In this very season of uncertainty and discontinuous change, we are being forced to be more creative about how we gather. Whatever that might look like for either the short or long term, the purpose for which we come together, to worship in order to be prepared to serve, remains. **There are many ways each of us can serve right now as the Body of Christ in the world, even when we can't move around as we typically do.** This season calls for us to step outside our comfort zones while still maintaining appropriate social distancing, in finding ways to share the love of Christ and serve those around us who have needs, whether we know them or not.

Whether we realize it or not, we are making history every day. This situation forces each of us, especially our churches, to adapt and do things differently during this liminal season. I would dare to say that, once we are past the pandemic infection, most of our churches will realize that the ways in which we have been responding (making our worship and Bible studies available in different ways, caring for others, etc.) should be continued. Let's take this opportunity to lean deeply into the Spirit of God, meditate on scripture and commune in prayer with the Living Christ...and not be afraid to experiment with new ways of being the Church, the Body of Christ. I am convinced that **God has prepared us for such a time as this,** and we have access to all the resources we need as we serve Together on God's Abundant Journey.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'S. J. D.', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

