

Paw Creek Presbyterian Church Weekly Letter - March 19, 2020

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Paw Creek Presbyterian Church on Facebook and YouTube

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
though its waters rage and foam,
and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
- Psalm 46

Dear Paw Creek,

In these unprecedented times, we cling fiercely to images of the unchangeable strength of God against all tumult and fear. And we cling to one another for we know that together, as those who share the knowledge of the Good News of Christ, we will find his kingdom. On Tuesday of this week, already a lifetime ago, I was at the aquatic center for a swim. It turned out to be the last swim for the foreseeable future. Afterwards in the locker room I met Mr. Richard Metz and in conversation learned that he is the pastor of Glorious Full Gospel Tabernacle, which is located behind the Excelsior Club off of Beatties Ford Road. We talked about the stresses and strains on our respective congregations in these days, and agreed to pray for each other's churches (please join me in adding them to your prayer list). As we parted (with an elbow rub) we thought about the coming of Easter in just a few weeks, and about the Easter truth that is still ours even in the midst of Lent: death has been swallowed up in victory, the powers of evil that challenge us have already been defeated, God's victory is assured. Everything we do in these days has the potential to become a way to live out and display our deep faith that these things are true. To have that faith is to live in the certainty of hope that these trials will pass. And from that hope comes the strength to pour ourselves out in

caring for one another. Please join Brother Richard and me in claiming this truth and this power of the Gospel.

Last night the Session of Paw Creek met for the first time via electronic video conferencing. All of our elders were able to participate, and we had a very productive meeting as we reviewed the things we are doing to witness to God's love, and some new things that we want to implement. This letter is a report to all of the church on those conversations.

1. Beginning today, I will send out a weekly letter like this to everyone who normally receives our monthly newsletter. It will go out by email and postal mail, and will be available on the church website. I will share news about virtual church activities, about members of our church community, and about our prayer concerns to keep us all a bit more connected.
2. Sunday morning worship will continue to stream live each week at 11:00 am. It is available on Facebook and now also on YouTube. You can reach either platform by clicking the links on our website homepage. Previous services are available on those sites throughout the week. You may be interested to know that last week's service was accessed over 900 separate times as of last evening!
3. We will also begin making audio CD's of the service to mail out to all who request them. If you have not previously used this service, you can request to be added at any time. This is especially helpful if you are not able to watch the live stream.
4. The worship experience itself will be evolving as we experiment. Mark and Patrick will both begin participating so that we have the gift of music each week. Also, a member of the session will join me in leadership each week to give you some fresh faces to look at. I would guess that with these additions (and without the need for a long list of opening announcements as we had last Sunday) the services will be running around 45 minutes. There will be a simple order of service on the website each week for you to access or print out.
5. During the worship service, everyone who is watching in real time will be able to text prayer concerns for sharing with the congregation later in the service.
6. As I mentioned above, the Session experimented with video conferencing last night. It went pretty well, as each of us pushed past our comfort zones. Although it is new for all of us, we want to give it a try for other church activities as well. If you cannot connect by computer or smart phone, you can still call in from a regular phone (cell or land line) and participate in the audio portion only. Specific instructions are listed later in this letter.

7. On Sundays at 10:00 am there will be a prayer meeting, as we are used to having each week, conducted on Zoom. You are invited to participate and help share concerns for inclusion in the worship service.
8. On Wednesdays at 5:30 there will be a Bible Study on Zoom. This will include folks from both the morning and evening classes, and anyone else who wants to join us.
9. The Congregational Care committee is preparing a list of families in the congregation to be divided up among all our session members. As soon as this is ready, elders will begin calling each family on a regular basis to check in, share news, learn of needs, and help keep us all better connected. Your assigned elder can also be a good additional point of contact when you need to get in touch with your church family.
10. As I mentioned in my note last week, in person pastoral visits to home or hospital are discouraged except in exceptional circumstances. As we get organized, I will look forward to staying in touch by phone. But please, if you want to chat, even just to hear a familiar voice, don't hesitate to give me a call.
11. If you have needs of any kind (errands to be run, chores to be done, information or advice), please be sure to let the church know. If you are on Facebook, you can post it on our page, or you can call me, your assigned elder, or the chairs of the Congregational Care Committee - Joy Tyler and Karen Cathey.
12. If you are willing to be available to help with errands and such, please call Karen Cathey, who will develop a list that we can turn to.
13. If you or anyone you know has a financial hardship, the Social Service fund is designed for assistance in times like this. Please call Karen or Grady Cathey.
14. Session members are keeping watch for news of ways that we can be actively helpful to the larger community. At this point, most programs (such as food assistance at our Back Pack Buddy partner school, River Oaks Academy) are not seeking volunteers because of social distancing. As this changes, we will let everyone know.

With all of these things going on, here is some practical information about how to access it all:

- Kim is now working from home. She has the capability to do everything there that she can do in the office. Please call or email to make sure we have correct contact information, to add yourself or a family member to the postal mailing list, to receive audio CDs of worship, or any other questions you have.

- If you want to participate in Zoom for prayer meetings or Bible Study classes, you can do the following:
 1. On your phone or computer go to zoom.us and click “Sign up, it’s free” in the upper righthand corner. Follow the prompts to create a new account (it’s free!). User name is your email, and you create your own password.
 2. As part of the sign up process, allow the website to download the zoom app - you will use the same name and password as on the website.
 3. Let us know that you want to participate: contact me for Bible Study, or contact Debbie Taylor for Sunday prayer meeting.
 4. We will send you an Invitation via email once the meeting is scheduled (it will be a different invitation each week)
 5. At the time of the meeting, open your invitation and click “Join Zoom Meeting”. That will open the app and take you to the meeting. Click to allow use of video.
 6. During the meeting, keep your microphone on “Mute” and only turn it off of Mute when you want to speak. Without this there is so much background noise that it’s hard to hear.

- If you want to call in for audio only, please just let Debbie or me know. Each week we will contact you with a phone number to call and ID number to enter to be connected. The phone numbers are long distance so be sure you call from a phone that has unlimited long distance.
- Starting next week, the order of worship for Sunday morning will be attached to this weekly newsletter for those that receive it by mail. Starting tomorrow, there will be a link on the website homepage so that you can download it, and print if you wish.

In all of this, I want to say a special word of thanks to our Session members for their great ideas, creativity and support last night and always. And an extra special word to our wonderful staff. Mark and Patrick are going the extra mile to bring beauty and Spirit to our new worship reality. Kim, quite simply, is holding it and us all together - she knows how to do everything! Thank you all.

Each week, I will close with the prayer concerns that I know of at the time this goes out. Please continue to send requests to Ann Cashion or me; to call in to our 10:00 am prayer time; or to text concerns to me during the service. For today, Thursday, March 19:

1. As I have worked on this letter today, I received word that Erskine Foard died this morning in hospice care at Presbyterian Hospital. Erskine was God's faithful servant for decades at Glenwood ARP Church, and has been a cherished member here at Paw Creek in recent years. Please remember his daughters, Becki and Sharon. They will have a private burial service soon and a memorial service later when we can all gather again.
2. Please pray for John and Elaine Litaker and their family. John is comfortable at home, and earlier this week accepted in-home hospice support to assist in his on-going care.
3. Lovee Steele is at home recovering after a hospitalization and emergency surgery.
4. Frank Dale was hospitalized with complications from surgery to remove a skin cancer, and is now in the Rehab wing at Presbyterian Hospital.
5. Please pray for all of those in nursing and rehab care who are now on lockdown and unable to visit with their families. Pray for the staff who are caring for them, and for all medical staff. Pray for our country and our world, for leaders with strength, and medical researchers with brilliant knowledge to understand and lead us forward.

Thank you for taking the time to read all this - it will get more simple as time goes on! Let us close with this prayer, offered in the Book of Common Worship for a time of National Crisis:

God of the ages, in your sight nations rise and fall, and pass through times of peril. Now when our land is troubled, be near to judge and save. May leaders be led by your wisdom; may they search your will and see it clearly. If we have turned from your way, help us to reverse our ways and repent. Give us your light and your truth to guide us; through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of this world, and our Savior. Amen.

Blessings on us all,
Elliott

Question of the Week - (Each week I plan to pose a question, gather your responses, and share them with everyone the following week - a simple way to keep in touch):

How are your millennials? Children or grand-children, college students, graduate students, young marrieds, 20-somethings, the next generation. Have they come home? Are they sheltering where they are? What changes and challenges are they facing?

Email, text or call and I'll compile the information next week.