When “stay at home” orders were issued suddenly with the onset of the COVID-19 virus, our pastors and worship teams responded quickly by moving services online. Using tools such as Facebook Live, Zoom meetings, YouTube, and conference calls, our congregations were able to gather together for worship even while not under the same roof.

Some services are incorporating short videos from church members leading portions of the worship service, or just showing how they are during this time. Some are using music videos with lyrics to help with congregational singing. The “chat” feature can be used to share prayer requests. Some send pictures of their home communion set up so that the images can be shared.

One pastor reported that a recent sermon showed views from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Others have reported an increase in giving as those who have watched the service remotely have sent in offering funds to help maintain the online presence. There are reports of increased attendance since the services have moved online, with old friends or former members worshiping from where they live outside the area.

Another bonus to worshiping online is the opportunity for those who are homebound to be able to participate. “Our 90 year olds have embraced technology, and are participating in our online bible studies and small groups,” said one pastor.

“We’ll never go back to having only the service in the sanctuary,” said another pastor. “We are reaching more people with our online presence. So, when we can meet together again, we will continue to air our services.”

Presbytery of New Covenant Congregations on YouTube
- Atascocita Presbyterian Church
- Clear Lake, Houston
- Covenant, College Station
- Faith, Baytown
- First, Alvin
- First, Bryan
- First, Galveston
- First, Huntsville
- First, Pearland
- First, Sugar Land
- Formosan, Houston
- Grand Lakes, Katy
- John Knox, Houston (under Becky Downs)
- Korean Central, Houston (English service)
- Northwoods, Houston
- Spring Branch, Houston
- St. Andrews, Houston
- St. John’s, Houston
- St. Paul, Houston
- St. Paul’s, Needville
- St. Thomas, Houston
- Webster Presbyterian Church
- Westminster, Nacogdoches
- Woodlands Community Presbyterian Church
- Also, St. Philip, Houston has a link to sermons on their website.
Dr. Not Afraid

His name was Eugene R. Kellersberger. He was one of many American missionaries to what was then called the Belgian Congo, and has since then been called Zaire, and that today is simply known as the Democratic of Congo. Between 1903 and 1970 there were 65 missionaries from Texas who went to labor in the Belgian Congo. In those years there were others from other states, including 14 from Arkansas, 12 from Louisiana, and two from Oklahoma.

Kellersberger was born August 6, 1888 in the little community of Cypress Mill, Texas which lies on Farm Road 962 just east of Highway 281, between Johnson City and Marble Falls. After graduating from the University of Texas in 1911, he enrolled at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, earning his M.D. in 1915. The following year, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, he left as a medical missionary with his wife, Edna Bosche, for the Belgian Congo.

Working in Bibanga, Kellersberger treated more than 10,000 cases of African sleeping sickness, caused by the bite of an infected tsetse fly. His wife, Edna, contracted that disease and was forced to recuperate, first, in London while Eugene completed a course in surgery at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, and later in Texas with the couple's two daughters. Unfortunately, while staying with her children with her father, in October 1923 she was shot and killed by her father's estranged wife. In 1930 Kellersberger remarried to Julia Lake, a traveling representative of the PCUS Board of Christian Education.

While continuing his work in Bibanga, Kellersberger became an authority on the treatment of leprosy. Because of his willingness to touch leprosy patients, he became known in the community as “Dr. Not Afraid”. He developed into such an authority on the treatment of leprosy that in 1940 he was asked to become the president of the American Leprosy Missions, located in New York City. So, after 24 years of work in Bibanga, Congo, he moved to NYC where he worked for 13 years. He retired to Florida in 1957 and died in 1966. He is buried in the place of his birth, Cypress Mill, Texas. Inscribed on his gravestone are the words from Romans 8:37 – “More than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Among other Texans who served as 20th century missionaries to Congo were Thomas Chalmers Vinson (evangelist, 1912-1928) and Glenn and Betty Murray (evangelists, 1939-1974). Theirs is a powerful legacy of responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the great physician, that these and many others have left us. For that, and the labors of so many others, we are grateful.

Kellersberger continues on page 6
The word “Zoom” has taken on a whole new meaning for many of us as we adjust to life under the threat of COVID-19! For me, it has moved from a cute saying on a car commercial to a way of life to connect with others “face to face” in a time of quarantine. It uses our energy in different ways and it is causing a lot of weariness and exhaustion for many. I am grateful that we have the technology, and for those who have embraced its use, but there is a part of me that wants to have the real face to face embrace!

As I was preparing to lead worship for Palm Sunday (by Zoom), I found that I wasn’t ready to move to the Passion story quite yet. I wanted to stay with the celebration and the parade. This was still early on in “stay at home” and I recognized that I was having a difficult time giving expression to my feelings of grief and loss, or even acknowledging what all had changed. I knew that I was missing quarterly meetings with pastors over lunch, and going to the office. It took a couple more weeks to realize that I missed driving in the car and listening to music, and having space between meetings to answer emails, or to reorient myself. I also realized that I felt more alone.

In my “new” office space on the front porch, I have become more aware of how nature is responding to COVID-19. There doesn’t seem to be a need to “zoom” as the bees and the butterflies flit about the flowers looking for sustenance, or as the birds look for earthworms and grubs in the grass. The sun comes up, and the sun goes down. The temperature changes day to day with the weather. Nature has its rhythm. I am trying to find mine.

Part of the challenge with finding the rhythm is that things seem to be changing daily if not more often. It can be difficult to keep up with all of the calls, and the emails. I find that trying to do more than one thing at a time (like checking email during a Zoom meeting) makes me less attentive to either. And the next thing I know it is evening and I am overloaded feeling like I didn’t get much accomplished—like writing this column which is now two weeks late. What I might have written two weeks ago probably wouldn’t apply to the situation today with all of the changes over the past couple of weeks.

Maybe this is a wake-up call for me to not be too complacent or over confident. Maybe this is a wake-up call to this new reality that many in the church have been reticent to embrace with the use of technology. Maybe this is a wake-up call to take more time in relationships and less time in business. Maybe this is a wake-up call that our communal life needs more community as we try to care for those who are least able to handle the effects of the COVID-19 virus.

In the midst of all of this, I find that I have been amazed by how our pastors have responded in caring for their congregations. It has been a challenge to figure out how to conduct a worship service weekly when we can’t gather together in our sanctuaries. It has been a challenge to provide pastoral care when one can’t visit in the hospital or in the retirement community. It has been a challenge to reach out to our communities when we are supposed to “stay at home.” It has been a challenge to pastor a church and become your children’s teacher as schools closed but kids still need to learn.

And, our pastors have excelled in meeting the challenges! There was a meme that appeared on Facebook about a month ago that said, “Your pastor has never pastored a church through a pandemic before. When s/he opens, people are going to say s/he should have closed. When s/he closes, people are going to say s/he should have opened. When s/he does not shake hands, people are going to say s/he needs faith. When s/he shakes hands people are going to say s/he’s foolish. S/he’s going to make some difficult decisions to protect the flock considering everything from your spiritual growth to legal liabilities that you aren’t even thinking about. Every Pastor believes that they pastor the most amazing groups of people. Remember this: No one wants things to go well at church as much as your Pastor(s). Your Pastor needs your prayers and support right now.”

And to that, I say “AMEN!”
Highlights from the March 21 Presbytery Meeting

With the beginnings of the shut downs due to the COVID-19 virus, the Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee (EAC) made the call to go virtual, utilizing the Zoom meeting platform. The decision was made to streamline the meeting by acting on what business items needed approval, and offering an opening and closing prayer (rather than a full worship service with communion).

There were more than 150 people on the call representing congregations across the presbytery. Moderator Melissa Nelson ran the meeting efficiently exhibiting patience and care for those for whom this technology was new. The EAC had come up with a plan to be able to have debate on issues that might be controversial, and to be able to answer questions, and to vote.

The items of business included the approval of these items:

- To approve the Omnibus Motion which included approval of the minutes from the November, 2019 meeting, as well as the dismissal (with our thanks) of several Administrative Commissions who had served at recent ordination and or installation services of ministers;
- To concur with three overtures being sent to the General Assembly;
- To grant honorably retired status for three minister members (Cassandra Dahnke, John Hirling, and Dean Pogue);
- To approve the first reading of proposed revisions to the presbytery bylaws and a new Transgender Inclusion Policy;
- To approve the presbytery budget for 2020;
- To approve a slate of nominees to serve on presbytery committees;
- To approve the request from the Presbyterian Church of the Redeemer to charter as a member congregation of the PC(USA). This caused much celebration, and the chartering service will be held later this year.

Lynn Hargrove was asked to say a closing prayer, and her choice of singing the Doxology together demonstrated a limitation with Zoom meetings. This caused a lot of laughter as we attempted to sing together with lag times between participants.

We are grateful for our friends from Lufkin, First, who were to host the meeting, and for the preparations that they made to be ready for the arrival of the commissioners. All in all, it was a good meeting! The next stated meeting is scheduled for July 18 at Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Houston.

Love in the Time of COVID

Jim Hannan is a local artist and the husband of Rev. Jackie Hannan serving the Atascocita Presbyterian Church, Humble. Jim has a studio in the Heights but like most artists he has been impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown and has had to work at home. Jim noticed people walking, running and riding bikes through his community and realized that many of us have been impacted especially as it relates to seeing our loved ones. He created a piece of art called “Love in the Time of COVID” and is inviting the community to write the names of loved ones they are not able to see or touch at this time. His instructions:

Please write in the names of individuals you are thinking of and miss during this time and help me add leaves to the tree with their names. You can send Jim the names to be added or better yet, message Jim and stop by to sign in person. (HannanArt233) / Facebook Hannan Art and Photography) or visit my website www.JimHannanArt.com.

You are invited to come by my studio when this is over to see how the piece turned out. Thank you for Participating and stay safe!
How will we know when to reopen?

The decision on when to re-open for worship and other church activities is complicated. Each congregation has its own context. A church of under 50 has different circumstances than a congregation of 600 or more. Our congregations spread across 39 counties in Southeast Texas. Some counties have had more cases of COVID-19 diagnosed than others. One pastor said, “When I can make visits in the hospital again, we will consider reopening.” Another said, “With all of the precautions, and no singing, and no bulletins, while keeping our social distancing, it just isn’t worth it to gather at this time.”

Each Session will need to determine what is best for their church community as they consider the health and well-being of their congregants. In light of the number of cases in Houston and the surrounding counties, many have chosen to stay closed through the month of May to take a “wait and see” attitude with regard to COVID-19. https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/houston-church-not-reopen-greg-abbott-texas-plan-15234802.php

While we can't tell you what to do, we can strongly urge you to make your decisions carefully, and to consider remaining closed for a few more weeks. Let’s not add to the grief that people are already feeling by rushing back to church which could contribute to the spread of this deadly virus.

There are so many things to consider for the health and safety of our congregations. Although it seems that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has given the go ahead for churches to meet again, there are parameters which you can find here on pages 39-41: https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/opentexas/OpenTexas-Report.pdf.

New guidelines from the Attorney General’s office are found here: https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/admin/2020/Press/Third%20Revised%20AG%20Guidance%20for%20Houses%20of%20Worship%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Crisis%20-%202.20Final.pdf

Another helpful article is found here: https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/fbclid=IwAR1KqAYoNVpFbdiBZmD8LPZhk2Ekvi4nCTdq4z0OFFmpsANKr5qOEv97U

Guidance from the Disciples of Christ suggests four phases: Assessment, Decision, Communication and Implementation. Here are more details for each phase:

Assessment: What are the groups that use your church facility? Are you in a place with at least 14 days of declining cases of COVID-19? Who are the people in your congregation and on your staff who might be vulnerable due to age or health conditions?

Decision: What are the local, state and federal guidelines advising? From what county/zip codes does the staff and congregation travel from to get to the location? What precautions will you need to take – face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, taking temperatures, as well as social distancing? What will you do if people won’t comply? What are the usual practices of your congregation regarding physical contact – hugs, handshakes? How will you sanitize the space after each use? What steps will the congregation take to ensure staff safety, health and well-being, both physical and mental? What expectations does the congregation have of the staff members? What are the financial implications if you have to provide personal protective equipment? Will you need name tags with congregants wearing masks? How will you accommodate those with hearing impairments that need to read lips?

Communication: How will you communicate your plan to your congregation and your community? How will you convey the decision making process, and the consequences of not complying? How will you show that you are in the vulnerable population that should not attend in person? How will this message be clear and concise?

Implementation: How will you enforce your decisions if people choose not to comply? Who, what, when and how will you do cleaning and sanitizing that is effective? How will you obtain the supplies?

Here is guidance from the Wisconsin Council of Churches: https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/


Know that God is glorified as we worship virtually, and will be pleased with how we cared for the flocks with whose care we have been entrusted!

No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.
- 1 Corinthians 10:24
Masks for All Campaign

Hope Disaster Recovery, SHUR and The Restoration Team are collaborating with faith based groups and Houston Responds to ask congregations to make reusable masks for distribution among the under resourced and most vulnerable.

If your you or your church is interested in supplying masks or being a collection site, use this link to register https://hopedisasterrecoveryllc.formstack.com/forms/masks. Designate a mask drop-off area labeled “Masks for All”, then contact HOPE Disaster Recovery for pick-up or visit the HOPE website https://hopedrtx.org/covid-19 for collection sites.

Wearing face masks help stop the spread of COVID-19. Your generosity goes a long way to help keep people safe. For more information, contact Sonya Meyers at sonya.meyers@hopedrtx.org.

Welcome Rev. Rachel Young!

Rev. Rachel Young has been hired as the Coordinator for the presbytery’s Vital Congregations Initiative (VCI) as that work moves into high gear. Rachel serves part time as an associate pastor at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church in Houston where she is involved with the VCI efforts as well as spiritual formation. Rachel will help with the cohort groups, coaching, and other aspects of the VCI programs, which is estimated at 10 hours a week. Her email address will be ryoung@pbyofnewcovenant.org.

Kellersberger from on page 2

Today there are many in this country who are exemplifying courage as they risk their own lives, responding to the coronavirus pandemic. They, too, have earned the moniker “Dr. Not Afraid”, a name that is not at all restricted to those with an M.D.

The story of Kellersberger’s life and service can be found in two works by his daughter, Winifred Kellersberger Vass. One is in her book, Dr. Not Afraid (published in 1986 and again in 1999). The second is in a presentation she made in March 1986 at the annual meeting of the Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest. In the latter she also summarizes the work of several other Presbyterian missionaries to Congo.

Crisis Response Care

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, and we navigate our new normal, Crisis Response Care (CRC) is adapting by adding virtual classes to help continue training and provide resources. Through a partnership with Denver Seminary, CRC will host three virtual classes. On June 16, “Ministry in the Age of Pandemic”, from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. MDT, on June 17, “Enhancing Resilience”, from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. MDT, and on June 18, “Operational Stress First Aid”, from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. MDT.

Dr. Naomi Paget, FBI Chaplain and Crisis Interventionist, will present these classes that will also provide CEUs through Crown College. All classes will be presented live and one time only. There are no prerequisites and everyone is welcome to attend. Times listed are in Mountain Daylight Time.

If you have any questions, please email crc@kloveair1.com or call 916-251-2273.
One for the Healers

By Rev. Shawn Kang,
Mosaic Village Church, Houston

Mosaic Village Church is seeking a way to put our love into action in this time of the Covid 19 Pandemic. We have all seen the images of our healthcare workers working tirelessly even in the face of great risk to their own and their family's health. There is no way to thank the sacrifice and compassion of these amazing workers.

Mosaic Village Church has been doing a little fundraiser for “One for the Healer” Gratitude Meals for these brave women and men, by getting them delicious meals from local partner restaurants!

In return, for each meal funded by donation, Mosaic Village Church will match that dollar for dollar and donate it to the Houston Food Bank Virtual Food Drive so they can help feed the most vulnerable of our population needing food at this time (up to $2000).

We committed to four consecutive Mondays that started April 13 and ended May 4 where we will be delivering 50 delicious dinners ($10 per meal) to the staff at Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital. In the first three weeks we have raised over $1300 and served 150 meals. That also means $1300 for the Houston Food Bank!

We are so thankful for Restaurants such as: The Blind Goat, Dak & Bop, Burger Tex, BB Italia Kitchen, Piazza Café and Ling Long Dumpling & Noodle House, who have partnered with us in our efforts.

We have one more Monday for this cycle should anyone want to donate or partner in this effort!

https://mosaicvillagechurch.weebly.com/updates.html

John Knox Camp for Kids

In partnership with Save the Children and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, children who were impacted by Hurricane Harvey can attend the 2020 summer camp at John Knox Ranch for at least 50% off. This camp program is intentionally designed as a safe, loving, inclusive space where campers practice communication skills, self confidence and self awareness in a fun, beautiful natural setting.

Register at no financial risk to you. There will be a delayed start of summer camp beginning June 28. You are encouraged to sign up now at no financial risk. A full refund can be requested at any time. Information about the Coronavirus response and updated refund policy can be found at https://www.johnknoxranch.org/page9864627.html. Details about the designated Harvey Scholarship can be found at https://www.johnknoxranch.org/page9913947.html.

The John Knox Ranch Camp and Retreat Center is located in Mission Presbytery.
Don’t Miss Out! Be a Part of PYCC

Do you know a young person who exhibits a mature faith and has gifts for leadership? Do you know an adult with a mentoring spirit and a strong relationship with Christ? Then encourage them to apply for the 2020-2021 Presbytery’s Youth Connection Council (PYCC).

Our presbytery’s Youth Council is a wonderful opportunity for young people to share their gifts and explore their leadership abilities. Youth on the council work alongside adult members to design and lead fellowship, mission, and worship experiences for the young people of our presbytery. Through these events, this council seeks to deepen faith and relationships with God as well as building relationships between youth and adults in our presbytery.

We need you to identify young people and adults in your congregation who have gifts for ministry and leadership potential and who will be willing to make the commitment to be a member of the 2020-2021 PYCC. Information and applications will be mailed to all churches and can be found online at www.pbyofnewcovenant.org. Potential youth and adults should complete applications and submit them to their home church for review and endorsement. Churches can submit up to four youth (in 10th – 12th grades) and three adults (over the age of 23) to serve on the council to represent your congregation.

Don’t wait! The deadline is June 28, 2020. Thank you for empowering the youth of our presbytery to serve as leaders of Christ’s Church!