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Minister of the Word and Sacrament Terry Kukuk, Executive Presbyter
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Dear Siblings in Christ throughout the Presbytery of the Miami Valley,

We continue to live with much stress and uncertainty. Weariness has set in for some. Impatience is on the rise. We struggle to listen deeply to the person in front of us, not to mention the Spirit's still, small voice, waiting for us in silence. We can feel the sandpaper in the words we speak, and the razor's edge of words spoken to us.

First came the Covid-19 pandemic. All that we had taken for granted, such as worshipping in person, meandering grocery trips, and visiting with family and friends came to a grinding halt. These interruptions continue as we seek to love our neighbors by being mindful that Covid-19 is still among us.

Now, we are confronted again by the ever-present reality of Systemic Racism. Systemic Racism feeds on practices and prejudices that value or devalue people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The protests happening in our towns and throughout our nation are full of holy lament as rising voices call attention to the fact that our neighbors of color live lives that are constantly interrupted due to its presence.

Our calling as God's people requires us to ask again: "*What does our witness to Jesus Christ look like in a time such as this?*" Perhaps this season of Pentecost is not accidental; may it turn our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit! Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:22-23 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. How is this fruit evident in how we listen, and work, and play? How is our ministry marked by this fruit? How have *you* seen the Spirit move?

The presbytery webpage contains two "toolboxes" to help you find ways to be Our Lord's Church during this time. Resources related to Covid-19 and Racial Justice have been gathered. It is our prayer that you might find among these tools the words, the conviction, the Spirit to provide you with energy, information, ideas, and compassion that will help your mission and ministry thrive even in these lean times. Perhaps you will find a new asset that will make your work easier. You might find yourself reacquainted with an old "tool" that is still helpful. If you notice that you have an idea we haven't made available, please share it with us! One important "tool" we would like to draw your attention to is the *21 Day Racial Justice Challenge*. It provides some first steps to engage over an admittedly challenging topic. Maybe you use it to supplement your own devotional life. Maybe you invite your congregation to go through it together over three weeks and invite some discussion.

Galatians 6:2 tells us to bear each other's burdens, for in doing so we fulfill Christ's call to love. We know some of you are tired, stretched in ways you could not have anticipated. We want these resources to help ease your load, even as you look to ease the burdens of the ill, at-risk, and all-too-often marginalized in your community. Call it "planning," call it "self-care," call it whatever you need to, but please take advantage of these assets. You do not have to go it alone. We are with you and are for you.

With affection, your partners in ministry,

The Leadership Council

Bruce Saunders, Leadership Council Chair
Alice McCollum, PMV Moderator
Ben Beres, PMV Vice Moderator
Donna Courtney
Ted Dennis

Stan Gockel
Cliff Haddox
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