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Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues in Ministry,

The vision and mission of the New Mexico Annual Conference are centered on local church ministry: our priorities are to support, equip, and resource local congregations to do God's work in their mission field. I've been working with leadership from our Council and Finance and Administration (CF&A) and our Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to find ways to provide immediate financial relief during this season of the coronavirus/COVID-19, especially recognizing that as most congregations are no longer gathering for in-person worship and as the economy struggles, giving to local churches is impacted, producing undue strain on your finances and ministries.

Effective immediately, CF&A has agreed to suspend the expected local church tithe of 8% of operational income for two months (March and April). In other words, churches are not expected to remit their fair share (the 8% tithe) for the next two months as we all live into this uncertain season, with no expectation of needing to "catch up" later in the year. Because of past faithfulness on the part of our local churches, coupled with prudent stewardship on the part of our CF&A, sufficient reserves are available at the Conference level to allow local congregations this short-term reprieve. It is hoped that this will help local churches weather this time of uncertainty and even, perhaps, expand ministry in their local contexts.

Similarly, our Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits will suspend the next two months of billing for the local church portion of pensions and health benefits (your bills for April and May will reflect this reduced burden). Again, these two months will not need to be "caught up" later in the year. Any payroll deductions (UMPIP withholding, MRA/HRA or additional, selected coverage such as dental or vision) will continue to be billed to the local church. Because of past faithfulness on the part of local churches and very effective management of these funds by the Board, Pensions and Health has reserves to provide this short-term relief.

I'm so very grateful to our CF&A (and especially the Chair, Rev. Dan Boyd) as well as our Board of Pensions and Health Benefits (and its Chair, Rev. Joe Whitley) for this bold step in faith. Both groups quickly took up this challenge and the question was not *if* we might do this, but *how*. Again, it is hoped that this short-term relief will support all of our local churches during this unusual season and strengthen us all for ministry together. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Griselda Sandoval (Conference Treasurer), Anna Marshall (Conference Benefits Officer), or myself at 505-255-8786.

Blessings,

Randall W. Partin