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Thursday, May 14, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues in Ministry,

Less than two months ago, when we were first finding our way together into the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wrote to share with you that our Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and Council on Finance and Administration had both quickly agreed to provide some financial relief in the form of temporarily suspending our expectation of a tithe (8% of ordinary operating income) as well as a temporary suspension of billing for pensions and health benefits. It was our hope that by lifting this burden for a period of time, our congregations could navigate this uncertainty with maybe a little more health and vitality. Many of you have called, written, and commented how grateful you were to have this bit of relief during anxious times.

I have been struck, furthermore, by how nimble, creative, and resilient so many of our churches have been in the midst of this pandemic. Some of our congregations have continued to contribute to the tithe during this season, and for that generosity we are all very grateful and humbled. Many of you have applied for and received loans through the Payroll Protection Program, and have thus been able to further shore up your budgets and staffing costs. Others have experienced great generosity among your congregations, as giving has held stable or even increased in spite of all that is happening.

While our times are, in many ways, no less anxious and no less uncertain, I'm writing to encourage you to begin the process of "coming back online" with your monthly contributions to the tithe and faithful payment of the local church portion(s) of pensions and health benefits. The suspension of the tithe (by CF&A) was intended for the months of March and April. That means that this month's (May) ordinary operating income is expected to be tithed. That monthly report and tithe remittance is due on June 10th. Similarly, beginning in June, you will start receiving your regular invoice/bill from our Benefits Office asking for payment of the local church portion of your pastor's health insurance and retirement, as well as your fair share of the benefits we offer our retired clergy. That bill will be due June 20th.

I recognize that "coming online" financially may be harder or slower for some than for others. We are not all weathering this storm in the same ways. You are encouraged, however, to do as much as you can to move in the direction of faithful support of our Shared Ministries and shared obligations to our clergy (active and retired). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Griselda Sandoval (Conference Treasurer), Anna Marshall (Conference Benefits Officer), or myself at 505-255-8786.

During this time when we are still unsure of how this will all unfold, I recall the words of 1 John 3:2, where we are reminded, ". . . it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when He appears we will be like Him because we'll see Him as He is." Our faith, even in uncertain times, keeps our eyes and our attention focused on Christ. May it be so for us now and always.

In Christ,

Randall W. Partin