Dear Pastors and Clerks of Session, December 17, 2021

These have been difficult months filled with many complicated decisions and constant flexibility. We have grown tired of waiting, yet we find ourselves in the Advent season. We know that at the end there is hope and light and peace. We need to see that same result coming as vaccines are beginning to be given. But in the meantime, we need to wait and watch, in hope and with grace.

The CDC and the NIH have warned that the next 30-60 days could bring a significant surge in infections as people travel and let down their guard out of love and fatigue. We encourage all churches to remind worshippers of your protocols if you meet in person, particularly as our northern friends begin to return to our area from other parts of the country.

In the last few months, many pastors and sessions have felt a great deal of tension as they have tried to begin in-person worship with appropriate safety protocols. This has taken a toll on pastors and church leaders, emotionally and spiritually, as much of the anxiety is turned toward them. The Steering Committee is in prayer for all our churches and knows that sessions and task forces are working diligently to keep up with CDC guidelines and local positivity counts. We appreciate the creative ways churches have continued to provide care, support, and worship for those who do not feel safe to return in person.

The Steering Committee, at its December 17, 2020 meeting, took action in response to the precarious position we find ourselves in as we live cautiously alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective immediately, and except in emergency situations, the Presbytery, its Commissions, Committees, Teams and staff will be conducting their business virtually thru February 11, 2021. The General Presbyter is available to provide virtual worship or to be present in virtual session meetings. Please do not hesitate to reach out for guidance and support.

### This decision was not made lightly and comes from a place of love for our churches and pastors. We would not like for staff or volunteers to share the virus inadvertently by moving between congregations. If you have concerns or questions, please feel free to contact us. We look forward with joy to the day when we can all be together again. We are reminded of the message in Galatians 6:9: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

We wish you all a blessed Christmas and a healthy and happy new year.

In the love of Christ,

Melana Scruggs Charmaine Ponkratz