



Greetings Bordentown Presbyterian Congregation!

Thank you for your thoughts and prayers! Christi and I are well, sheltering at our home in Kinshasa. The PCUSA had requested all mission co-workers to return to the US. We are grateful that, despite the strong urging, World Mission accepts that there can't be a "one-size fits all" approach and has granted us permission to stay in Kinshasa with the understanding that we will isolate at home, from where we normally work anyways. Frankly, we think that we would unnecessarily expose ourselves by entering flights and airports with many other people, and then having to navigate our way around some temporary lodging place in the US, needing to do shopping to set ourselves up for an extended stay. Our other PCUSA colleagues here in Kinshasa, Larry and Inge Sthreshley, likewise asked to stay. The Sthreshley's are seconded to work with Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA) World Health and their focus is on public health and nutrition programs in Congo. We just heard that the organization they work with has been offered a huge grant to try to coordinate a Covid-19 response in Kinshasa.

The Congolese government took strong measures quite early, closing schools, banning gatherings of more than 20 people, including worship services and funerals. In all of the country, there are now over 300 cases confirmed with over 20 deaths. Kinshasa, which has over 90 percent of the recorded cases in the country has been isolated from the rest of the country. Flights, road and river passenger travel are suspended. Kinshasa was supposed to go into an intermittent two-week lock down, but as soon as the announcement was made, food prices spiked, which prohibited people who live from hand to mouth, to even meet their daily need. So the lockdown was annulled even before it got started. The business center of Kinshasa, where also the Embassies and international organizations are based, has been locked down since this week, as it is the epicenter of the outbreak here. All people who test positive, whether they are symptomatic or not, are admitted to one of several designated hospital. Treatments are done at a few central hospitals, but overall, the capacity here is very limited. We heard that there are 16 respirators for a city of 12 million. The health ministry office of our partner church in Kinshasa is requesting help to purchase wash stations, masks, gowns, thermometers, etc. and Jeff is working with our colleagues at Presbyterian World Mission to send them funds for that purpose. We heard from the Director of a Presbyterian/Mennonite hospital in the Greater Kasai Region, where Presbyterian mission work began 130 years ago, that they don't have tests there. So, even though they have a few suspected cases in his hospital, in the country's statistics the Kasai still show up as Corona free.

Despite the strong measures taken by the government, the risk of spread in Kinshasa is probably high. The city quarters are crowded and lack running water for the recommended hygiene measures like frequent handwashing. People live day-to-day by what they can

make or sell and this makes it difficult for them to respect a strict stay at home request. The shutting of the borders of the city will hopefully slow considerably the spread to the rest of the country. Any delay leaves the possibility that experiments on treatments may yield some positive results in time for that to be used here. We do continue to reassess the situation, particularly as there are announcement of special evacuation flights being arranged by the US or European governments. So far, the focus is on people who have traveled to the Congo for a short visit, rather than those living here. Early on in March, Christi and I each needed to cancel trips to visit partners. I was to attend an ecumenical forum in Cameroon about the crisis in the Anglophone regions. This was being organized by the WCC, All Africa Conference of Churches and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. I had to cancel the day before he was due to travel there, and very much regrets that. The violent conflict in Cameroon has little international attention, while the vast majority of children in the Southwest and Northwest regions have been out of school for what is now the 4th year. Christi was to go to Rwanda, which has since closed its borders. It had been a while that she visited with partners there, as they had to cancel it last year.

Our kids are well. We all had a wonderful vacation together in Ghana, over Christmas and New Year. Salome stayed on afterwards to start a two-year assignment in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Her husband was visiting her when her employer – a university in the Netherlands – asked her to consider returning to the Netherlands. They decided to do that, but ended up in an airplane with coughing passengers. They went through two weeks self-quarantine at their home, but extended it because a friend came over with his family for a birthday and had been coughing. Salome is now working virtually with her colleagues in Ivory Coast. Naomi finished her final medical internships in Ghana in December. With that she completed her medical studies and has her medical degree. She had a few extra weeks of vacation in Ghana in January, then visited my parents in California in early February before starting work as an E.R. doctor at a hospital in the Netherlands. She began just as Covid-19 was starting to expand there. Of course, we're concerned for her safety, indeed for all medical workers. Naomi seems to be coping well, though, and just had this week her "greenlight" conversation following an initial trial period, and that went very well. Next to his regular shifts as security guard for Securitas, Matthias had become part of the company's planning team late last year to help with the scheduling of guard services at different locations. With the many people calling in sick now or needing to be home for the family during this pandemic, he is now full-time occupied with the planning and can do that from the home. He is also in the Netherlands.

The current situation has, of course, implications on our ongoing work. Inability to visit some of the schools and churches to follow-up on projects. The need to put on hold trauma healing sessions and the large training event planned for later this Summer, etc. The uncertainty how long this will last. Please, pray for our partners and their communities.

Love, Grace and Peace,
Jeff and Christi
