



AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEW JERSEY

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Rev. Miriam Méndez

Executive Minister and Senior Regional Pastor

Dear ABCNJ Colleagues and Friends,

“I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:3-6

We continue to be grateful for the good and diligent work our ABCNJ pastors and churches are doing to stay connected, build community and share the gospel in your respective communities. We are also grateful for the way in which you are taking seriously the responsibility to think of the safety of all within our communities.

As COVID cases rise again, we find ourselves facing more restrictions. While this year has been challenging, the upcoming few months can prove incredibly difficult for our churches as we enter into a season that traditionally includes special services, events, parties, and gatherings. While some of our congregations might have members torn about gathering online or in person, we are now seeing many of our churches who found ways to meet safely in person returning to online worship.

Allow me to share with you a few observations that your regional staff has made working with congregational leaders during this time. We want to also remind you that, even as church buildings have closed, the Church has remained open and alive.

Think of **connection, not perfection**. We encourage you to find ways to provide consistent community connections. Many congregations are using Zoom to provide online worship, coffee hours, and Bible studies. Some are connecting using phones for conference calls. As we physically isolate ourselves from one another, we must ensure that all of our members can still connect with the church community.

While this time has provided an opportunity for creative approaches to the ways we connect and do ministry, it also requires us to **recognize the loss during this time and approach it with a pastoral heart**. We realize that this year is very different. There are annual traditions for our churches that will not occur this year. It is essential to recognize the grief that many of our congregation members will face from this loss. We can also remind one another that Scripture

and Christian history contains moments where the people of God were displaced and longed to return home while finding new ways to worship.

As church leaders, it is also vital that we take time to **care for ourselves**. We have heard stories from pastors overwhelmed as they learn new technology and strive to make sure everyone stays connected. Ensure you guard your heart during this time, including taking time weekly for your sabbath and still taking vacation time, even if vacation means traveling to your living room.

Remember, you are not alone. We are grateful to all the pastors and church leaders who have participated in various town hall meetings, webinars, and online gatherings that we have held through the Region. Continue to connect with other colleagues and leaders and hold one another up in prayer. Feel free to reach out to your regional staff, as well. We continue to lift you up in prayer, especially in the months ahead. Please know that your regional staff remains committed to providing resources that support and strengthen our congregations, church leaders, and ministries.

Grateful for you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Miriam Méndez', written in a cursive style.

Rev Miriam Méndez
Executive Minister and Senior Regional Pastor