PDA COVID-19 Guidance for Volunteer Host Sites and Volunteer Work Teams

It has been over one month since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The actions taken by countries around the world has slowed the disease. One action taken by PDA was to suspend all hosting activities through June 30th, 2020. Although progress has been made and areas of the United States are reopening, we must remain attentive to what is the most faithful action concerning our hosting ministry.

Hospitality is a core teaching of our faith. We live out this teaching through our hosting ministry. Through the hosting ministry volunteer work teams are welcomed into communities, individuals and families impacted by disasters are remembered and homes are recreated. In 2019 over 7000 volunteers were welcomed by over 30 host sites and millions of dollars of volunteer labor transformed lives and communities.

The Letter of 1 Peter reminds us to…” Be hospitable to one another… serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” One of the gifts of the spirit is wisdom. We have been praying for wisdom in abundance during the past month.

**PDA has concluded that the wisest decision at this time is to suspend all PDA hosting activities through October 1st, 2020.** This was not the easiest decision, but it is the wisest decision for the following reasons:

1. The travel ban for all PCUSA staff and volunteers continues for the foreseeable future.
2. We are concerned for our volunteers who are travelling into areas where contracting COVID-19 is a possibility and for our host sites and communities who have a risk of being infected. It is unwise to expect a host site to respond to the possibility of being responsible for a volunteer who becomes ill.
3. Concerns for the ability of work partners to receive and integrate volunteers.
4. Most host sites are not presently equipped to implement the changes and precautions that are needed to safely host volunteers.
5. We will continue to evaluate the situation and provide updates throughout the summer months.

To paraphrase the words from Ecclesiastes, “There is a time to close, there is a time to reopen and there is a time to wait.” This remains a time to wait.

We are in a time of waiting, yet as advent people we do not sit idly by. As advent people we wait activity. We offer these suggestions.

05/18/20 for more information contact Eden Roberts PDA.CallCenter@pcusa.org
HOST SITES
(1) Continue to develop your protocols for hosting volunteers in a COVID-19 environment. The call center can share helpful resources and remember each host site has unique dynamics.
(2) Continue to communicate with work partner(s) and seek new partners as the landscape is sure to change moving forward.
(3) Continue your hosting committee meetings to keep members engaged and ready when the time comes to reopen.

VOLUNTEER WORK TEAMS
(1) Let me share a term I heard for the first time from a disaster response colleague. This is a time to ‘mission in place’. Seek out opportunities in your community to share the love of Christ. As one example, the Red Cross is experiencing a shortage of blood due to the cancellation of so many blood drives. If you are able, donate blood.
(2) We have heard of one volunteer team that donated the funds raised for their cancelled trip to the work partner in the community where they were scheduled. The work partner will be able to hire local construction workers to do the work necessary, so that homes are completed. You can also donate directly to PDA for COVID-19 Response through this web site https://pma.pcusa.org/donate/make-a-gift/gift-info/DR000148/.
(3) Keep your team connected so you are ready to go when the way is clear, and the sites are open.

The hosting ministry of PDA is bigger than one disaster or one season, or a pandemic. By moving forward decently and in order, when the time is right, we will be ready for thousands of volunteers to stay at dozens of host sites and donate millions of dollars of volunteer labor. Homes will be rebuilt, and families will be healed.

You can find more information about PDA’s COVID-19 response and how you can help at the following web site…https://pda.pcusa.org/situation/covid-19/

Peace,

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