

May 4, 2020

To the Churches, Clergy, and Friends of the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ:

... There are definitely moments right now I want to shout, "I'm over this". I suspect I would not be singing a solo on such a refrain.

Even as I own my impatience, I recognize that it can become a problem if it distracts from faithfulness. This is the caution I would offer us all right now. We are going to find ourselves impatient at times. But our decisions ought not be made out of such impatience, but rather by our faithfulness. We need to continue to make decisions based on how we value the sacredness of life and on our commitment to keep one another safe and healthy. It's hard. I get it. But it is where faith leads.

To that end, I provide another series of requests, resources and announcements for the month of May:

#### **CHURCHES & CLERGY**

**1. I would encourage the leadership of all our New Hampshire Conference churches to continue suspending in-person public worship and all other public gatherings through, at least, June 14th.** This recommendation takes into consideration the Governor's current Stay at Home 2.0 order plus the federal phasing guidelines once a community is allowed to re-open. Of course, this may yet still be extended.

**2. I would draw to the attention of church leadership the new Universal Guidelines put into effect on May 4th as part of the Governor's Stay at Home 2.0 order.** Employees of "places of worship" were named as essential. However, Stay at Home 2.0 provides specific guidelines for employees who show up on the worksite including daily health screenings. More information can be found at: <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-media/stay-at-home/documents/20200501-universal.pdf>

**3. I would continue to encourage churches involved in search and call to continue to modify their work as necessary.** Many of our search and call churches have been making significant progress even in light of being limited to digital tools for discernment. Even as parts of our society open up, travel is likely to remain a higher risk factor. Your Search and Call Staff are ready to discuss with you ways to move forward with search processes without asking candidates to travel.

**4. I am asking church leaders to be intentional and thoughtful about what modifications need to be made to church worship and activities to keep their community safe before they consider resuming in-person worship and activities.** Please be aware that we are learning new things about how to keep one another safe all the time. For example...there has been a lot published about how singing (congregational or choral) is a high risk activity

as it can spread aerosols of the virus a significant distance. Regrettably, we need to include the recommendation that live singing not be a part of our worship life at this time.

**5. I am asking our churches to give our pastors and worship staff a Sunday off from worship responsibilities...and I will be providing a resource to allow you to do so.**

**6. As you worship on-line, I urge churches to be vigilant in your consideration of on-line security protocols.** This is particularly true for those who are using Zoom in order to be interactive. Last Sunday during worship, one of our UCC churches was Zoombombed with child pornography. I would strongly encourage churches to limit screen sharing to host only and to always have a co-host of the Zoom meeting who is prepared to remove a guest from the meeting if something inappropriate happens.

**7. The Conference will be continuing with regular installments of our Clergy Check-ins.**

**8. The Conference Office continues to add resources to our Staying Safe in the Midst of Contagious Disease web page.** These resources are available at <http://nhcucc.org/caring-for-congregations/staying-safe-in-the-midst-of-contagious-disease>)

**9. We want to make our churches aware the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office has made the recommendation to all non-profits that they add provisions for electronic voting to their By-laws.** This is obviously a learning from our current situation. I hope over the weeks to come that we will be able to provide you with some more specific language for amending your By-laws to this end.

## CONFERENCE

**1. The Conference Office will remain closed for all meetings, gatherings and visits indefinitely.** The Conference Office will remain closed for the months of May and June and perhaps beyond that. Just as we are asking churches to consider their unique risk factors and make the necessary modifications, we are doing the same with regards to the Conference Office. We are having significant success conducting Conference business via digital means and do not plan to re-open the Office to the public until such time as those risk factors can be minimized.

**2. Our staff will not be making in-person visits to churches for an indefinite period of time.** We are also going to be slow to have our staff resume in-person church visits. In the traditional way we've done our work with our staff being in many different communities in a week, our presence would create an increased health risk of transferring infection from one community to another. There will be enough health risks our churches will need to be considering over the weeks to come without our presence adding an additional one. We will continue to serve you by digital means as best we are able.

**3. Due to the pandemic, we will not be holding on-site camps at Horton Center this summer.**

Blessings, Gordon