

August 24, 2021

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

When I wrote my last set of Covid guidelines in May, I hoped with my whole being that it would indeed be the last set I ever needed to write. I excitedly planned my fall calendar to be present (in person) for many important events in the lives of our churches. But like most journeys of healing and recovery, the path out of Covid is proving not to be a straight one. We are now at a time when we need to deal with the realities of these vicissitudes.

As you will recall, one of the key metrics for our guidelines has been having a state-wide 7-Day Covid Positivity Rate below 3%. Our state-wide positivity rate has been above 3% for more than 2 weeks now. This is clearly not a fluke, but a reality we must account for in our plans. As I write this, our 7-day Rate is 5.8% (\*). There is not a single county in New Hampshire that has a rate below 3%. We are learning that while vaccinations limit the severity of catching Covid-19, they don't seem to limit transmission. And, of course, congregated gatherings, such as churches gathered for worship, remain locations where there is a high risk of transmission.

Given the current circumstance, the New Hampshire Conference is making the following recommendations:

#### **CHURCHES & CLERGY**

- 1. I would encourage the leadership of our New Hampshire Conference churches to engage in serious discernment regarding discontinuing in-person (indoor) public worship and all other indoor public gatherings until such time as the 7-Day Covid-19 Positivity Rate in your county drops below 3% for a 7-day period or longer.** I would particularly urge this of church communities which have children as an active part of your worship and fellowship life. For churches that decide not to discontinue in-person activities, I would urge worship outdoor as long as possible and maintaining social distancing and masking protocols in all situations while the community is gathered.
- 2. We continue to recommend that religious education for youth and children be held virtually for the time being.**
- 3. 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>

## CONFERENCE

- 1. The Conference Office will remain closed for all meetings, gatherings and visits indefinitely.** Once the state-wide Covid Positivity Rate drops below 3% for a period of at least two weeks, we will again consider setting a date for reopening. **All Conference programming is to be held virtually at this time unless the event is being held outside or has required testing as part of the Covid protocols** (i.e. Clergy Convocation and Horton Center activities.)
- 2. Our staff will only be making limited, select visits at this time.** If you have a scheduled visit from a Conference staff member in the next couple of months, it would be good to talk with that staff member to confirm or reschedule it.

Blessings,  
Gordon

\*The two resources I generally use for keeping track of Covid-19 trends are: *Tracking our Covid Response* (<https://www.covidexitstrategy.org/>) which was recommended by the UCC Insurance Board and *the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Covid-19 Dashboard* (<https://www.nh.gov/covid19/dashboard/overview.htm>).