

April 5, 2022

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

Our journey with Covid realities has been a long, long, long journey. For the past two weeks, our state-wide 7-day Covid test positivity rate has been hovering right around 3%. Some days a little above and some days a little below. Some of our counties have remained below for a couple of weeks. Additionally, about six weeks ago the CDC adjusted its low transmission rate to a 7-day positivity rate of 5% or below. From this point forward, we will be using 5% as our new metric.

I am well aware that with Holy Week approaching, many of our churches have already been out ahead of us in discerning how to worship safely. All we do is to aid your discernment. I continued to be inspired by the faithful decision making of our churches during these late pandemic days.

With all that said, we are ready to offer some new Guideline...

CHURCHES & CLERGY

1. Given the improving circumstances in many parts of the state, but also the differing circumstances in parts of the state, we can no longer offer guidance that is appropriate for all of our churches. **Therefore, the New Hampshire Conference will cease offering universal guidance to all our churches and encourage the leadership of each church to discern the most appropriate protocols for worship in consultation with local health officials.** Should we experience a new surge that raises the state-wide 7-day Covid test positivity rate about 5% for a period of two weeks or more, we will then consider providing new guidelines.
2. **Similarly, we believe the resumption of religious education and fellowship activities for youth, children and adults are now a matter for local church discernment.**
3. **We encourage our churches to be prayerful and thoughtful about the stewardship of time and energy of clergy and other church leadership during this time.** There is a narrative we are hearing frequently. Churches are eager to resume many, if not all, of their pre-pandemic activities. Simultaneously, they also want to continue all the new ministries that were developed during the pandemic. This cannot be done sustainably. It is asking too much of your clergy and other church leaders. Churches are going to have to make some hard

decisions with regard to the stewardship of time and energy over the months to come. Allow your mission to guide you and have the faith and courage to make these difficult but necessary decisions.

CONFERENCE

- 1. The Conference Office is anticipating re-opening for public visits, meetings and gatherings on Monday, April 25th.** Many of us are craving the relationship benefit that comes from meeting in person and we are pleased to be able to offer Conference groups the opportunity to do so. However, we have also learned over the past two years that much of our work can be handled effectively in a virtual format. We would encourage Conference Ministries, Mission Groups and others who meet at the Conference Office to thoughtfully consider the stewardship of their members commuting time and of the travel impact on God's creation when discerning when to meet in person, and when to meet virtually. Our hope is that virtual gathering remains commonplace with a couple of in-person gatherings a year for relationship building.
- 2. Staff has already been engaging in travel on a selective basis and that will continue to expand within limits.** Worshiping and preaching in our congregations and attending ecclesiastical celebrations are our priority and we welcome invitations. There are, however, other aspects of our work that we will continue to engage in virtually as it is better stewardship of time and energy and lessens our impact on Creation. Most Search and Call work (working with congregations in pastoral transition) will continue to be done virtually. Much of our staffing of association Committees on Church and Ministry will also be handled virtually (even if the Committees themselves decide to meet in person).
- 3. Horton Center will again offer on-site camps with more camps and more weeks being offered this summer.** We are excited to see the return of some camps that we weren't able to offer last summer, such as our Grandparents' Camp. There will still be some Covid protocols for our campers, volunteers, and staff to follow this summer. Those will be announced sometime in June. At the current time, we expect they will most likely resemble the ones from last summer.

Lenten blessings,
Gordon