

June 9, 2020

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

We have reached the portion of our journey with Covid-19 when I suspect the discernment of some of our church communities may start to diverge. This is appropriately so. Congregational size and regional public health differences should have impact on a community's discernment. However, I do want to caution us from merely embracing the inertia to return things to "normal". That impulse is both selfish and dangerous. Our discernments need to be grounded in the welfare of the entire community. Our path forward must not only keep everyone safe but also best meet the ministry and faith needs of the totality of our community.

The Conference will continue to provide recommendations that we believe are in the best interest of all 133 churches we serve. We recognize that the uniqueness of some church situations will lead them to a different discernment than we are recommending overall. We will seek to provide the best resources we are able for our churches in all circumstances as you seek to navigate these times. Richard and I have already been engaged in plenty of one-on-one conversations to aid churches in their discernment and will do so as long as it is helpful.

One of the reasons I am so cautious about the inertia to return things to "normal" is that it can trick us into thinking we are "done". We can delude ourselves that once things feel like normal this experience is in the past. Friends, I think that is a trap. If we are going to keep our churches healthy (in all meanings of that word), we must remain committed to the practice of adaptive leadership. The decisions we make today may not be right for next month. Those we make next month may no longer be what is right in Advent. It will be when we are adapting to the shifting needs and realities of our communities and the new ways in which the winds of God's Spirit may blow that we will be our most faithful.

Here are the requests, resources and announcements I have to share as we enter the summer:

CHURCHES & CLERGY

- 1. My recommendation to the leadership of our New Hampshire Conference churches is a continued suspension of in-person indoor Sunday worship through, at least, the end of July.** My rationale for this recommendation is explained in the pieces I've written ("[Not Yet](#)" and "[Safer Isn't Safe](#)") over the past couple of weeks. Additionally, some of the antidotal feedback we are receiving from church communities further ahead in the re-opening process than

we are is that following recommended modifications for public worship can be a challenge in some communities. People return to a space in which they have a long history and can struggle to not act instinctually within that space. Getting people used to such modification in a lower risk setting such as outdoor worship can, at times, prove helpful.

- 2. We are actively working on revising our “Things to Be Considered for Returning to In-Person Worship” document to aide churches in their discernment. We hope to have a new draft available by Tuesday, June 16th.** While there are still details being worked on, our recommendations will include strict adherence to all eighteen of the [guidelines provided by the Governor’s Office](#) when providing faith communities the exemption to gather. Our recommendation will also be consistent with CDC recommendation that face masks be worn during worship (indoor or outdoor). We will also be recommending that there not be any (live) choral group singing or congregational singing at this time. While we finish working on our re-draft, we would draw your attention to [a similar resource](#) developed by the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Team of the National Setting of the UCC as well as some [liability guidelines provided by the Insurance Board](#).
- 3. I would continue to encourage churches involved in search and call to continue to modify their work as necessary.** It may be soon possible for properly socially distanced in-person interviews to take place as long as the candidate is able to drive to the interview. We would still discourage asking any candidate to take public transportation (i.e. air travel) to an interview. We do believe it is important that all candidates be treated with consistency.
- 4. The Conference will be continuing with regular installments of our Clergy Check-ins.** Our next set of Clergy Check-in for our local church pastors will take place on Wednesday (6/10) at 10:00 to 11:30 AM and Thursday (6/11) at 5:00 to 6:30 pm. The Zoom link (<https://zoom.us/j/981363971>) is the same for both. Information for how to connect by telephone can be found on the [Staying Safe page](#).

Our next Check-in for Chaplains, Counselors and Non-Parish Clergy will be on Monday, July 1st at 2:00 pm.
- 5. We are working to support our pastors in collaborations that will allow for appropriate time off over the summer.** During this pandemic, the stresses and expectations of our pastors have been increased. For them to continue providing

pastoral resources at the level they have been, quality uninterrupted time off is more important than ever. We are working with churches that will be continuing to engage in on-line worship over the summer to build collaborations so that churches can trade off covering worship for one another. Additionally, Richard and I are committed to recording a couple of sermons during the month of June that will be made available if churches would like to utilize them.

- 6. The Conference Office continues to add resources to our Staying Safe in the Midst of Contagious Disease web page. For a limited time these resources include opportunities for low-interest loans as well as some grant opportunities.** These resources are available at <http://nhcucc.org/caring-for-congregations/staying-safe-in-the-midst-of-contagious-disease>)
- 7. As we announced last month, 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.** We currently have some potential language under review by legal counsel. We will seek to make this available to churches as soon as possible.

CONFERENCE

- 1. The Conference Office will remain closed for all meetings, gatherings and visits indefinitely.** Right now, we anticipate the Conference Office will remain closed to the public at least through Labor Day.
- 2. Our staff will not be making in-person visits to churches for an indefinite period of time.** For the safety of both our staff and the communities we serve, we are not scheduling any in-person church visits at this time. We will continue serve you by digital means as best we are able.
- 3. While we are grieving not having camp on Pine Mountain this summer, we are excited for the ways in which we will be bringing the spirit of Horton Center into camper's home's through our HC@home program.** Read [this information](#) or visit HortonCenter.org for more information.

Blessings,
Gordon