

New Hampshire Conference United Church of Christ



March 16, 2020

Siblings in Christ,

During these past couple of weeks as my focus has been drawn more and more towards supporting our churches as each tries to embrace and innovate ministry for this season of the Covid-19 pandemic, I find myself reflecting upon the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee during the storm. As you will recall, the disciples were terrified. Jesus says to the storm, "Peace. Be Still" and the winds and the waters calm. Then Jesus asks the disciples, "Why were you afraid? Was your faith not sufficient for the moment?" Certainly, we are in the midst of our own storm of sorts. Not only does the storm rage, but it seems apparent that so do our fears. I am struck that Jesus doesn't admonish the disciples for not being afraid, but rather simply inquires why they are afraid. I suspect this was a rhetorical device to remind the disciples that if they rely upon it their faith is indeed strong enough to handle moments of fear and uncertainty. As is ours. Our faith is sufficient for this moment. And even though this storm may yet rage for a while long, perhaps it is to us now that Jesus says, "Peace. Be Still".

I am so very proud and encouraged by the ministries of our churches during this uncertain season. I have witnessed the ways in which you have innovated how to be community and to worship together even when it is safer not to have everyone together as gathered community. And I have seen you multiply your efforts to make sure that social distancing doesn't turn into isolation for those who don't have all the tools for connection. There are most certainly new challenges in these days, but your faith is shining through.

One of the things I would encourage us to be sensitive to in this season are all the mounting griefs. I know for me that the cancelation of the NCAA Tournament was a bit of a blow. It has always been a part of my March self-care regiment. It is a small thing but real. For others it may be canceled or postponed vacations, birthday or anniversary celebrations, proms, concerts, spring athletic seasons and the like. And then there are the items of even greater consequence like lack of earnings for hourly workers in situations such as the hospitality industry, effects on small businesses that need the regular patronage, and the reality that there are many in long-term care facilities who won't be able to be visited by their loved ones. As church, we have many liturgical and pastoral tools to help individuals and communities address their grief. In these days, we ought to be drawing upon them all.

I want to call upon every member of all our New Hampshire Conference Churches to take every opportunity to express your support and care for your pastors, staff, and church leadership. They are working tirelessly on your behalf and for your welfare. They are facing challenges some of which have not been imagined before. Your affirmations and your prayers mean more in times like this than you could possibly know.

I also want to encourage you to continue your giving to your church as you are able. Mail in a check or contribute electronically. Our stewardship must expand to meet the increasing needs of the day. There are vital ministries to continue and new ministries to be developed and they will need your support. Please continue to give.

Finally, I want you to know that you are in my prayers, the prayers of our Conference staff and leaders, and in the prayers of those in the United Church of Christ National Setting. We welcome your prayers as well. Every Sunday when I visit one of our churches, I speak to how all of our stories are intertwined. That feels even more real to me right now than it ever has before. For it is in our prayers and support for one another that I see God's grace ever-present even in these stormy days.

Lenten blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gordon Rankin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gordon" being more prominent than the last name "Rankin".

The Reverend Gordon Rankin
Conference Minister,
New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ