

May 4, 2020

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

As I read the gospel stories from the perspective of the disciples, I find myself often intrigued by the disciples' impatience and how it effects their faithfulness. Whether it is Peter wanting to build a permanent structure on the mountain of Transfiguration or Thomas declaring he will not believe unless he has proof of resurrection, the disciples wrestle with impatience a lot.

So do I. So do we all. Perhaps now more than ever. 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 consider 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. We had a church this past weekend candidate and hold election for the pastor it is seeking to call solely by digital means. 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.** The New Hampshire Conference has provided the "[Things to Be Considering in Discerning When and How to Resume In-Person Worship](#)" as a tool for such conversations. The Wisconsin Council of Churches has also developed an excellent resource. Please be aware that we are learning new things about how to keep one another safe all the time. For example, since we wrote the Things to Be Considered document, 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. We anticipate our Things to Be Considered document will need to be updated (probably monthly) to account for such new learnings. The next version will (regrettably) 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.** Without question, producing digital worship offerings has been taxing on our pastors and worship staff in a whole new way. And they need a break. They need a break without having to take vacation time. They just need a Sunday when they don't have to be the ones to produce the worship content. The UCC Council of Conference Ministers (CCM) is producing a worship service with the hope that it will encourage you to provide your pastors and worship staff such a break. The CCM worship service should be posted on the New Hampshire Conference website on or around May 6th and will be included in the Weekly News on May 12th. The service has been developed around the lectionary readings for Sunday, May 17th. However, the intent has been to keep the service general enough that it could be used a week earlier or a week later if that better fits the schedule for your church.
- 6. While you are continuing to 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. Where appropriate, passwords and waiting rooms can also be helpful screening tools.

- 7. 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 Tuesday (5/5) at 5:00 to 6:30 pm and Wednesday (5/6) at 1:00 to 2:30 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](#).

Those who are chaplains, counselors and non-parish clergy should have received a Doodle Poll to aid in scheduling their next Check-in opportunity.

- 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.** Please read the [attached letter](#) for much more information on this decision.

Blessings,
Gordon