

December 15, 2020

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

I know this is a busy season, so I will keep this focused and brief. The only change of significance between the November 15 recommendations and these recommendations is an extension of the cessation of in-person worship recommendation through the end of the season of Epiphany.

What has changed far more significantly are our Covid trends\* in New Hampshire. The Covid-19 positivity rate at the time of our November recommendation was 3.7% (we want to see it below 3%). A month later it is at 8.9%. (In Rockingham county it is currently at a 12% positivity rate.) The seven-day average of daily new cases in New Hampshire has increased from 208 to 836. Without question, things are not trending in the right direction and it is incumbent on us to be even more vigilant in safeguarding the health of our church and broader communities.

With all this in mind, the New Hampshire Conference is making the following recommendations:

#### **CHURCHES & CLERGY**

- 1. I would encourage the leadership of all of our New Hampshire Conference churches to consider discontinuing in-person (indoor) public worship and all other indoor public gatherings, at least through the season of Epiphany (February 16<sup>th</sup>).** As always, this recommendation may be extended as needed.
- 2. We are continuing to recommend that in-person religious education activities, particularly for children and youth, not be resumed at this time.**
- 3. I would encourage churches that are engaged with in-person interviews in the search and call process to conduct such interviews solely by video or phone conferencing means or to postpone them.** At the very least, I would ask that candidates not be asked to travel from out of state, even for socially distanced in-person interviews. The risk is too great for both the candidate and the search committee interviewing the candidate
- 4. The New Hampshire Conference Ministerial Staff is preparing a service that can be used by our churches on Sunday, December 27<sup>th</sup>.** Hopefully this can provide a day of rest for clergy and worship staff in our churches.

5. **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.**
2. **Our staff will not be making in-person visits to churches through at least the first quarter of 2021.** 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 to serve you by digital means as best we are able (including participation in virtual worship services).

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>).