

May 20, 2020

Dear Friends,

*“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.” Emily Dickinson*

Grace, Peace and Hope to you all!

Friends once again I reach out to you via technology to mostly discuss the issue of how the pandemic is impacting our ministries and providing resources during this time. I must admit, I am weary of this topic. I know you are too. I long for the time when I can gather with you and we can share with one another and we can hear God speak through our words, handshakes and hugs. I know that day will come and I know the content of our communication will change and grow as we go through this time, but for now we need to also proclaim the love and good news of God in very practical ways.

So, let me update you on several items.

1) CDC Guidance and New Information - The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released new guidance for the “re-opening” stages in the United States. This document can be found at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>

In addition to these resources I would encourage you to visit our Insurance Board’s website for church-specific guidance. They will continue to provide this kind of specific, practical information for our churches. <https://www.insuranceboard.org/covid-19-resources/>

The Council of Conference Ministers and the National Leadership has put together a pastoral letter to the United Church of Christ about the issue of opening sanctuaries for worship. Please take a moment to read this:

[https://www.ucc.org/news\\_pastoral\\_letter\\_should\\_churches\\_return\\_to\\_worship\\_in\\_their\\_sanctuaries\\_05192020](https://www.ucc.org/news_pastoral_letter_should_churches_return_to_worship_in_their_sanctuaries_05192020)

We are told we will receive specific direction and guidance on what local churches will need to do in order to open our churches here in Michigan. I do not have the specific dates on when that information will be released but we will keep you up to date.

2) Zoom Cafe with Mr. Dion Williams from Governor Whitmer’s office. On June 2nd at 12:30pm I will host a Zoom Cafe with Mr. Dion Williams who is the Director of Faith Based Affairs for the Governor’s office. We will have an opportunity to talk with Mr. Williams about the Governor’s thinking and plans, especially as it relates to local churches and ministry concerns, we have. A Zoom Invite was forwarded to all churches, clergy and chaplains of the Michigan Conference. If you are interested in joining this Zoom Cafe, please email Lisa at [lisa@michucc.org](mailto:lisa@michucc.org).

3) Michigan Annual Meeting and Conference Office Building Schedule - This last weekend the Board of our Michigan Conference voted to conduct our Annual Meeting in October through Zoom rather than an in-person meeting. You will hear more about that meeting in the coming weeks.

The Board has also affirmed the decision to keep our Conference office's building closed until at least the end of October. Conference Staff have done an amazing job at adapting to working at home and will continue to do that during this time. Please reach out to us as needed and let us know how we can be helpful.

Outside of my window is a small hole under the beam of a building. I have watched birds fly in and out, first carrying sticks and grass to build a nest, now I can see the worms wriggling in their beaks. I expect that soon I will hear the chirps of the babies and then I will see them poking their heads out to look at the world. It all reminded me of Emily Dickinson's words about hope. That sometimes unreasonable compulsion to lift up our heads and see possibilities and pathways forward. You know hope is contagious too. More so than COVID-19 apparently, or at least that's what a little bird told me.

Keep singing friends.

*Phil*

Phil Hart  
Transitional Conference Minister