



Northern Lights Region

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

*A partnership of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in
Alaska, Washington, North Idaho, and Montana.*



March 11, 2020

Dear Northern Lights Family,

Even as I sat down to write this letter, word came across my computer screen that the World Health Organization has officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a global pandemic. Here in the Northern Lights Region the effects are being unevenly felt across our wide geography. In Western Washington where the largest number of cases have been reported, pastors and congregations are making difficult decisions about how to modify or even cancel worship services out of concern for the safety of all. In other parts of our region, no confirmed cases of the virus have been reported.....yet. I believe it is only a matter of time before we are all feeling the effects. Now is the time to prepare.

For those communities not yet affected, now is the time to modify worship and other gathering practices to minimize the spread of infection. This could mean modifying the way you offer communion, eliminating the Passing of the Peace or changing it to a non-touch practice, encouraging separation in the worship space seating, and encouraging the most vulnerable to make good decisions about staying home and skipping group gatherings all together. Other practical measures include practicing good hygiene and deciding how to make decisions about whether or not to gather. A helpful resource is provided by the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>. Our General Church has also provided resources: <https://disciples.org/dns/disciples-and-covid-19/>

For those communities already affected and for other communities as the outbreak spreads, I encourage you to follow the recommendations of your County Health Department regarding large group gatherings. For instance, King Co., Washington, has recommended that gatherings of over 50 people cancel or postpone their events. The Governor of Washington, Jay Inslee has announced other mandatory measures regarding gatherings of 250 people or more. If you choose to continue worshipping in-person, I encourage you to practice safe hygiene, seek ways to protect the most vulnerable among you, and stay flexible if the situation worsens.

If you choose to suspend worship for a time, I encourage you to think creatively about how to stay connected as a congregation. For some, Sunday worship is a primary point of social contact. How can we ensure our members are not isolated? What role can the elders and other members play in keeping connected? How can we use technology to provide opportunities for gathering (online Bible Studies, livestreaming worship, etc?) Who will need extra help in getting connected through technology?

Your regional leaders are seeking ways to be helpful and supportive during this difficult time. Some of the ways we are already doing this:



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- Regular conversation via email and Zoom with the most affected pastors
- Passing along information as we receive it from denominational and national offices. We will also be gathering this on the website in a dedicated section:
<https://northernlightsdisciples.org/covid-19-response-and-resources/>

Other support we are also exploring:

- Regular weekly Zoom meetings with the Regional Minister to share ideas, plans, questions, and support
- Using Zoom to offer a Regional Worship alternative for those congregations that are unable to meet in person.
- Offering Emergency Technology Grants to congregations that need to purchase equipment to livestream worship services
- Offering the ability for individuals to donate online through the region's website and designate their giving to their local congregation. Though certainly not the first concern, I'm aware that one unintended consequence of not meeting for worship may likely be a drop in giving. Many congregations already have the ability for online giving but for those who do not, we are working on a user-friendly alternative.

Experts are telling us that the actions we take early on can help flatten the curve of the spread and hopefully lessen the impact of this virus on our communities. Our mandate from Jesus is to care for the most vulnerable in our midst. Therefore, even if we are not in the high-risk population, we know that many in our congregations are (Over age 60, underlying health issues) and it is our responsibility and Christian duty to do what we can to minimize their risk while staying connected.

If you have made the decision to suspend worship and/or are live streaming your worship service, please let the Regional Office know so we can post it on the website.

I give thanks for each of you and for the ministry of your congregations. Let us pray together for the safety of those most impacted by COVID-19 and for the wisdom and skill of our medical community and civic leaders.

Grace and peace,

Sandy Messick

Sandy Messick, Transitional Regional Minister