

**A Just Peace, Open and Affirming Conference**

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**A Pastoral Letter: The Maine Conference and Coronavirus –  
*Acting Together for the Common Good***

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **1 Corinthians 12:24-27**

Grace and peace to all in the Maine Conference,

We are receiving an education about just how connected we are as we engage the realities of the Coronavirus threat. The World Health Organization has now designated this virus a pandemic, and Maine has its first confirmed cases. With that reality, it is only a matter of time before Covid19 spreads more widely. How shall we respond? We believe that we are radically interconnected with all of humanity and all of Creation in Christ. Now is a time to act on our beliefs, out of concern for our people, our communities and our State.

Here is something I never imagined I would write to you – ***I urge you to suspend public worship, and all gatherings of more than a few people, at least for the remainder of March.*** We need to practice rigorous “social distancing” in solidarity with our communities and the whole State. We have a remarkable opportunity to act together for the common good – to exercise our autonomy in Covenant for the good of all. The Maine Conference has already canceled, postponed, or shifted to zoom, all of our events and meetings for March. We will monitor the situation and make other decisions going forward. It seems likely many churches will still meet this Sunday, March 15, but I urge you to suspend for March 22 and 29.

This has at least two aspects. The first is to support the move to “flatten the curve” by social distancing and following the practices of hand washing, staying home if sick, avoiding large groups of 250+ people and so on. This will help our whole community if we all participate, and will support the effectiveness of our healthcare system. We are engaging in prevention, before illness arises, in hopes that this will be a non-event. That is my fondest hope.

The second is to tend to our own people for their health. Our churches are filled with people who are especially vulnerable, whether because of age or medical conditions or both. We can faithfully decide to suspend public worship of any size in order to protect the individuals in our churches. No one has immunity to Covid-19, and none of us are qualified to make a risk assessment of the likelihood that we will catch it. The best practice is to stay physically apart until the virus passes. This will in fact limit the spread. We have the power to change the course of this disease. Our faithful course is to do our part.

I know that this asks for a sacrifice of our most cherished time of the week, when we gather and worship God together. I also know that our churches are strong in relationships, and that this can be a time to strengthen and expand those connections. We have an opportunity to demonstrate that the church is not limited to one hour a week on Sunday morning. We are so much more than that.

So, what will we do with our time away from the church building? **Be The Church.** Call one another, and ask questions to get to know one another better. Make visits if it is safe to do so, with distance between people. Worship with our families, or in quiet contemplation and prayer. Worship online (we will shortly have some links to streaming worship and many other resources on the Maine Conference website [www.maineucc.org/covid19](http://www.maineucc.org/covid19)) Deepen our Lenten practices. Take a walk in God's creation, being especially attentive to where God is growing something new. The possibilities are endless!

One thing I would ask of our parishioners is to care for your Pastor in this time, even as they care for you. None of us have done this before, and it is exhausting. Allow your Pastor to have some quiet time for contemplation or relaxation. They are working so hard right now to make sure their people are cared for. And tend to one another. This is hard on everyone.

The Conference Office is remaining open for now, as your Conference staff is able to practice robust social distancing both here and in our home lives. I will let you know if that changes. If you have questions or concerns you would like to share, please feel free to contact me at [diblood@maineucc.org](mailto:diblood@maineucc.org) or 207-622-3100. I will be happy to talk!

Praying for health and safety for our Conference, our nation, and our World.

In Christ's peace,



Rev. Deborah J Blood, Conference Minister

**Maine Conference events currently affected:**

- March 12 - Listening Session (Postponed – TBA)
- Pilgrim Lodge Deans' Retreat (Zoom Meetings - Possibly in-person in May)
- March 19 - Boundary Awareness Training (Cancelled - Hoping to hold the April 29 event)
- March 20 - Clergy Retreat (Cancelled)
- March 28 - MESOM Class (Meeting by Zoom)