At the end there will be a set of guidelines for congregations to reflect upon prior to even considering moving forward with in person gathering as a community of faith. The Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown-Daniels, Conference Minister for the Missouri Mid-South Conference, put together these resources based upon federal guidelines and best practices. We are grateful for her sharing these recommendations with us. As we know, Illinois is a diverse state. Our diversity demands a phased in approach using the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, and state and county guidelines.

For the love of God and our mostly elderly congregates, we urge you pastors, laity whether young, middle aged and older folks alike to put the lives of others and your own at the forefront of any decisions that are made. Don't rush back because every model tells us if we do that too early, more infections and deaths will occur. These recommended guidelines give you a roadmap for slowly moving forward in a safe and secure fashion.

Friends:

Basta Ya. Enough is Enough. I have had it with Coronavirus, COVID-19 or whatever you want to call it. I’m tired. I don’t want to be sheltered in place. My home is nice, but it has turned into a prison and I can’t even tell you when it did. I left at the end of February to do missionary work in the mountains of Honduras. For a week, I did not know what was going on in the world. When I returned home, March 6, everything had changed. I was confused. Then, it seems like everything exploded.

Food was disappearing from shelves and essentials like sanitizer, paper towels or toilet paper were nowhere to be found. At work, we began to talk about self-care and social distancing. Social distancing was the “new in thing.” I asked if anyone felt uncomfortable working in our office to let me know so we could authorize work at home procedures. No one said they did that morning but by the next day, one opted to work from home. Soon the Shelter in Place order was issued. Most went to working remotely.

Were things that serious. Reports came in about New York but that’s far away. We’re good, I said to myself. Denial is a wonderful gift at times. Most of us were in denial at first. Then pastors started to communicate to their congregations that everything would be fine? They continue weekly in-person worship. But was everything fine?
“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.” Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Like the wisdom writer from the Hebrew Scriptures, we are reminded that there is a time for every season, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith communities must begin to reflect and consider reopening options. I, as your Conference Minister, seek to provide support and resources for your Church leadership in order to prayerfully consider how and when you will reopen your church. I want to reiterate that given the severity of this pandemic, I strongly encourage you to consider taking your time in reopening your worship and ministry to in-person gatherings.

The following is a recommended guideline to a reopening phase of your in-person church ministry. As I have stated in previous recommendations, I reiterate that I, as your Conference Minister, have no authority over how your Church reopens. I respect your local church autonomy in this and all matters. However, given the serious nature of this pandemic, I offer you this recommendation as a starting point from which your Church leadership can create your own phased plan for reopening your Church during the pandemic.

Please note these phases may not be linear in nature. Given the fact that the CDC anticipates a second wave of COVID-19 infections, your Church leadership should be prepared for an increase in infections at which point, I recommend that you return to Phase 1 and follow protocol accordingly.

I researched the Center for Disease Control, each state’s department of health recommendations, and UCC/ecumenical documents regarding phases of reopening recommendations. I have included those references at the end of this document for your information. This recommendation provides five phases of reopening your church for in-person worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are described in the following manner as well as charts for your usage:

Illinois Conference Phase Forward Reopening Plan for Churches - Guidelines

Message from the Associate Conference Minister for Vitality, Transformation and Sustainability
Rev. Michelle Hughes

Tools to help teams work remotely
Some resources that may help you keep on top of things ...

1. Slack.com
Utilize Slack, a messaging tool, to quickly touch base with one another regarding a project, or to share files quickly and easily.
Instead of booking tons of meetings, Slack enables you to message or call one another quickly so you can get back to your projects and not miss a beat while you are working from home.

2. **Benchmark Email**
   Email marketing software that also tracks the success of their messaging.

3. **Zoom**
   You are probably no stranger to Zoom and its many benefits. This video communication tool is a necessity for remote teams. You can easily set up meetings. What is more, it has chat and the ability to set up from conference rooms, desktops, and mobile devices.

4. **Evernote**
   Evernote is a free app for your smartphone and computer that stores everything you could possibly imagine losing track of, like a boarding pass, receipt, article you want to read, to do list, or even a simple typed note. The app works brilliantly, keeping everything in sync between your computer, smartphone, or tablet.

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**Invitation from the Fox Valley Association Justice and Witness Committee**
Greetings from the Chicago Metropolitan Association. I am excited to be called to the Chicago Metropolitan Association as Acting Associate Conference Minister. I am following in the ginormous footsteps of Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers. I praise God for her ministry to me and the large imprint that her legacy has left on the CMA.

I am excited to bring my skills and gifts to continue the ministry of resourcing the churches of the CMA. My vision for the CMA will center around three initiatives: Training, Revitalization, and Organizational Excellence. God has given me a vision to equip the churches with relevant and robust initiatives.

To keep the ministries, the business and the work of the CMA viable and relevant a “Zoom” account has been purchased. Zoom is available for CMA Council meetings, Cluster meetings, COM meetings, Justice and Witness meetings, Off The Pews meetings and any other way to be present and communicate with CMA during these times of “physical separation”.

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**Report from the Acting Conference Minister serving Chicago Metropolitan Association**

Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff

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**An Invitation to the Illinois Conference from The Fox Valley Association Justice and Witness Committee**

**PLEASE JOIN US IN A CAMPAIGN OF GRATITUDE!**

The Fox Valley Association Justice and Witness Committee is initiating a letter/card/drawn picture-sharing campaign to thank our medical/health care professionals, first responders, essential business employees (people working in our grocery stores, restaurant drive-thru and delivery personnel, etc.), and our state and municipality officials and workers.

So many times, we send letters to let someone know when we disagree with them or think they’ve done something wrong. Let’s turn the tide and give a boost to our folks who are out there on the front lines caring for people and helping to keep life going while we are sheltering in place and personally distancing. You are invited:

- Write a letter of gratitude to an individual or group of people
- Prepare or create a “Thank You” card
- Draw a picture (this is a great way to get our younger generations involved!)

We invite you to send these expressions of gratitude directly to a local hospital (you can send them to the attention of the chaplain or social worker for distribution), police or fire department, local municipality, grocery store, restaurant, and/or other entity via mail or email. OR, if you do not have mailing supplies available, we invite you to send your expressions via email to jconfkimberly@gmail.com and we’ll get it out there.

If you do send your “thank you” messages directly, please be sure to email us so we can hear about the many ways this campaign is impacting folks!

Thank you for taking time to thank God by thanking others for the selfless ways they serve!
There have been two new platforms which have been created to enhance communication and provide a “safe place” for Pastor’s and clergy to share emotionally, and to share innovative resources during these challenging times. **Pastor’s Panel** - is a weekly gathering of Chicago Metropolitan Association for Pastor’s via Zoom. We gather for approximately 45-60 minutes to share information, “check-in” with one another, and share resources, issues, or concerns. The main objective is to let each Pastor know that they are supported by each another. The Pastor’s Panel meets at 10:00 a.m. on Friday’s.

I have also started a similar platform called **Clergy Corner** for MID’s, Associate Pastor’s and Chaplains with similar concerns and support availability. Clergy Corner also meets every Friday at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Please continue to pray for the on-going ministry of the Chicago Metropolitan Association.

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**Message from the Illinois Conference President**

**Rev. Charles Maney**

I have been thinking about the situation our Conference is in, a lot. Most of my attention has been directed at preparing for the May 13 Conference Council Meeting, where the Council will set the direction for the immediate future. We will consider alternative ways to accomplish the needed business of the Conference.

I have been a part of the Conference Minister Search Committee. We have a candidate to submit, and I am excited about our potential future. Our candidate could begin in October.

I have been fleshing out some choices for what the Conference leadership might look like as we go through the period after Rev. Justo González II leaves at the end of June and a new Conference Minister is ready to begin, likely in October. The Council will have different models to consider.

As I write this, we remain hopeful that the Payroll Protection Plan offered by Congress through the Small Business Association will provide the Conference with some desperately needed financial relief. We have been approved, but are waiting to see if we receive part of the distribution.

I pray that you are doing your best to stay hopeful and protect your loved ones. I pray that you are finding enough peace of mind to reach new and useful levels of prayer and personal growth. I pray that as the virus has provided a new way of seeing how the world is truly connected, we discover a more nuanced approach to love God and love your neighbor, as Jesus says all else hangs on that.

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**Stewardship Chairperson graciously steps down**

**Larry McCure**

**Eastern Association Commissioned Minister in Stewardship**

I have had the privilege to serve as the Chair of the Illinois
Conference UCC Stewardship Ministry team for the past 25 years. This ministry was initiated by the late Rev. Bob Sandman in 1991. Rev. Sandman approached me to join the ministry. Not sure of this calling, I agreed and became one of six charter members. Little did I realize that stewardship would not only be my calling but would become one of my passions. Serving on this ministry team has strengthened and deepened my faith in so many ways. It has connected me with so many faithful stewards and acquainted me with churches and pastors across Illinois and on the national level. I am so grateful for the opportunity and the experience. But, it’s time to move “over”.

Message from Newly elected Stewardship Chairperson
Rev. Melody Seaton

As with most of our churches, we weren't sure how we were going to fair in this Pandemic. To the Glory of God, we have seen about a 30% increase in giving with members utilizing all the mentioned ways to give. We have been focused on visibility and connection.

- During our first year, we equipped our webpage with a link for giving through PayPal.
- Last year, we obtained a 'card reader' for debit and credit cards transactions
- We also encouraged members to treat church giving as a bill and have their banking institutions pay us.

Communicate, Communicate - In our weekly email to members, we included all the ways they could continue their financial support. We also added ‘Cash App' and encouraged using the postal service for those who chose not to utilize electronic giving.

Leading with Power and Love
Rev. Brandyn Simmons

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. - 2 Timothy 1:7

We have all heard the phrase that these are “unprecedented times.” Many of us have uttered those words ourselves. Indeed they are for those of us saying as much, but for many of our brothers and sisters in the U.S. and abroad, it's no different than the norm: fear of getting sick, no health insurance, no job or one
that doesn’t pay a living wage, inadequate healthcare, etc.

So much is predicated around mindset and the point from which we view the landscape. Not only does the Coronavirus instill fear, but so does the uncertainty of having “never been here before.” But does this mean that we need to remain paralyzed as we wait for the storm to pass? Indeed not.

April 14, 2020

Dear Pilgrim Park/Tower Hill family and friends,

At any other time, we would be writing to tell you of the plants blooming, the plans coming together, the staff training and the community forming—all the necessary components of the successful season of summer camping. But this isn’t any other time. This is a unique moment where our every action has the ability to stop, spread or slow down the movement of the Coronavirus.

And so it is with heavy hearts that we announce that our Summer Camps will not take place as planned for 2020. Grandparent and me, Sport, Worship and Wonder, HUG, Godstock, and Spirits camps will all be on hiatus this year. This decision was made with the safety and well-being of our campers, our staff, our volunteers, our families and our whole communities in mind. Until we have a clear way of knowing who does or does not have the virus, we would have to follow the 6-foot distancing for all interactions. While we might be able to make these accommodations for sleeping and eating for smaller groups, there is just no way that we could guarantee this distance with our daily camp activities.

It is our plan for the camps to return, better than ever, for 2021. If you are registered for a 2020 camp, we have three options for your registration and deposit: 1. We can simply move your registration and deposit to the 2021 season. 2. You can request a refund of your deposit. Or, 3. you can choose to donate your deposit to our 2020 operation budget to help us sustain Outdoor Ministries at Pilgrim Park and Tower Hill during this time.

Please know that we share your disappointment. We know how healing it would be for your children and youth to be together with their friends in a place that is special—sacred and holy. As soon as it is safe and viable to do so, we will welcome you back with open arms.

Peace,
Mitch and Tracy

Happenings Around the Conference
“Food Pantry” Feeding program during these “Sheltered In Place” days at Kenwood UCC in Chicago and Kenwood Oakland Community Organization were able to supply over 60+ people with care packages that included fresh fruits, vegetables, hand sanitizer, gloves, masks, soap, and other resources. They will continue to support people through these times and beyond. Picture credit: Kenwood Oakland Community Organization

Pilgrim Faith had the privilege to host a Mobile Food Pantry on April 18 with St. Paul Lutheran Church Oak Lawn and Oak Lawn Community Church. All food was provided by the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Special thanks to Mayor Bury and the Oak Lawn Police Department for helping to make this happen. Together, they gave out enough non-perishable and fresh food to feed more than 700 people! Picture credit: Pilgrim Faith UCC, Oak Lawn.

Rev. Jamie D. Hawley of Lincoln Memorial Congregation UCC in Chicago hunts for mask to provide to community members. A coupe of days ago he reached out to the good folks at St. Paul’s UCC in Monee as a potential resource. On April 26, David Holston texted him “We’ve got 100 mask ready for you”. He drove to Monee to pick them up and thanks St. Paul’s, David and Christi. Picture credit: Lincoln Memorial Congregational UCC, Chicago.

The Little Free Library in front of First Congregational UCC in Downers Grove has been repurposed temporarily as a Little Free Pantry to assist families facing food insecurity during the pandemic. Individuals are welcomed to take what they need. Give what they can. Let friends, family, and neighbors know it's there for them. If you are able to donate nonperishable grocery items, place them in the Little Free Pantry. Picture credit: First Congregational UCC, Downers Grove

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**Play, Pray, and Learn! Ministering for Children and Families at Home**

Hosted by Thursdays for the Soul, this is time for children and families, and those seeking to connect to them at home or digitally. Joined by Rev. Sharell Shippen and Commissioned Minister of Christian
Formation, Debbie Gline-Allen of the Southern New England Conference and AUCE, we talked about connection with children, digitally and faithfully.

A resource adapted for this webinar is available on the AUCE website: Resources for Families @ Home.

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**UCBMA Emergency Grants Available**

The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCBMA) has emergency grants available to assist those in need who meet the criteria. If you are facing a critical situation and need financial assistance, you may be eligible for an Emergency Grant from the Christmas Fund if you are a:

- current Authorized Minister in the United Church of Christ;
- lay employee of a UCC congregation, Association, Conference, or National Setting with a minimum of 10 years of service;
- surviving spouse/partner of the above; or
- Member in Discernment for at least a year.

If you meet the eligibility criteria described above, please contact your Conference staff, who will then reach out to Rev. Krista Betz, the Director of Ministerial Assistance, to begin the process. UCBMA can respond to the increasing requests for assistance because of the generosity of individuals and congregations to the Christmas Fund.

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**Your Ministry During COVID-19: Reopening Your Church Office**

Insurance Board recognizes the important role churches play in their communities; congregations are eager to resume their ministries. Before employees and volunteers resume daily operations of your church, check the Governor’s website for your state. According to The White House Guidelines for Opening Up America Again, “State and local officials may need to tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances… Insurance Board advises churches to also stay current on the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). According to the CDC, “COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning about how it spreads and the severity of illness it causes.”

Reopening Your Church Office information sheet from the Insurance Board
Announcement Regarding 2020 National Youth Event

Due to the unforeseeable impact of COVID19 National Youth Event (NYE) at Purdue University is postponed until June 27-30, 2022. We are disappointed but not discouraged, and we have been hard at work to offer meaningful and faithful virtual gatherings this summer. We recognize this is not the same but nothing is the same. ... Many of our original NYE presenters are excited to be able to put together meaningful content that will be shared via the web and will include live chat features during and after each premier.

More details and registration are soon to come and will be found on the [NYE website](#).

In the Media

- **Food distribution pop-up sites start on South, West sides to fill gap during COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Nursing home employees prepare to strike over pandemic conditions**
- **The Southside Pastor and Church who are taking extra steps to ensure its congregation and community are staying spiritually, religiously, and mentally engaged virtually and digitally during the pandemic.**
- **Former HUD COO Named CEO of Embrace Living Communities**
- **Pastor makes Pilgrim Church debut on Easter via YouTube**
- **In divergent Easter celebrations, prayers for virus victims**
- **Here are some Chicago-area religious services to stream online**

Employment Opportunities

Click links to view [Ministerial opportunities](#) and [lay employment opportunities](#) within the Illinois Conference.

Conference Calendar for May

May 6: **Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders -Coronavirus**, 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next scheduled gathering on Zoom. Presenting guest is Rev. Santina Poor, Pastor of Hope UCC in Moline.

May 7: **The Power of Story**, 2:00 p.m. via Zoom. Join Professional Storyteller Valerie Tutson, as well as the pastors of a UCC Church Plant, Gilead UCC in Chicago, Rev. Rebecca Anderson and Rev. Vince Amlin for a conversation about the power of storytelling.
May 13: Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders -Coronavirus, 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next scheduled gathering on Zoom. Dr. Karen Hurley will be joining us and leading a presentation on health practices during this pandemic.

Upcoming Events

June 4-6, 2020: Postponed: Illinois Conference 56th Annual Celebration. The theme of the 2020 Annual Celebration is “Bridge Building - Rise Up & Build”.

June 6: CMA Spring Meeting via Zoom. Details and other information will follow but, for now, save the date!

June 20, 2020: Digital Gathering: Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Mass Poor People’s Assembly and Moral March on Washington will be a generationally transformative digital gathering.

July 24-25, 2020: National Youth Event. More details and registration are soon to come and will be found on the NYE website.