

# MICHIGAN CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

P.O. Box 1006 | East Lansing, MI 48826-1006 | [www.michucc.org](http://www.michucc.org)

(517)332-3511 | Fax: (517)517-339-2621

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*"When it was evening on that day...the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked...Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" John 20:19*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Grace and Peace to you!

I write to you from my apartment where I have spent many days now "social distancing" and where it appears, I will spend many more. It is obvious, almost to the point of ridiculous to say that "things have changed," but the reality of that statement has been weighing on me lately. For the first few weeks most of our attention was focused on responding to this pandemic, understanding what we need to do and how life would unfold in this "new normal." Now, that we have a little bit of time and experience on our side it is helpful to lift our eyes, ever so slightly, to the future.

The difficult reality is that it is likely that much of life, especially "church life," will continue to be significantly impacted for the next year. It is likely that we will not be gathering in our church buildings for worship, in each other's homes for meals, or even around the fold out tables for those church meetings. This, I know, can seem shocking. I have moments when this reality hits me and I am still surprised, but it is time for us to look at this reality head on and begin to consider what that means.

Let me share just a couple thoughts and end this letter with hope, not because "it's my job" or because it makes for a nice ending to this kind of letter, but because I believe in hope and I believe there is much for us to do and a path forward for us to follow Christ.

"Re-opening"

All of our churches have cancelled "in person" worship services and meetings. Most have moved to some sort of digital format of gathering to worship and to do the work of the church. There will come a time when we will feel pressure to change this, to gather again in person, to sing together and pray like we used to. **The day will come, but it is not now.** I understand the motivation. It comes from our longing to see one another and alleviate some of the worries and aggravations that come from our quarantine, but my friends, moving too quickly will: (1) endanger the health and lives of our sisters and brothers, (2) undermine the progress we have made "bending the curve" of this pandemic, and (3) harm our witness and message of God's care and love to our communities.

Our Conference office will remain closed through May and possibly for longer. Our Conference staff will continue to work from home. We have been meeting weekly by Zoom to support one another and coordinate our ministry, and we will continue to be ready to serve you in any way we can.

## "Epiphany in Lockdown mode"

This is not just a time to simply endure, there are things we can learn in this time. Gifts of insight and epiphanies. If we do not embrace the reality of the situation, we will miss many of these lessons. I am convinced that what we learn during this time will be amazingly helpful in the future.

My apartment is very quiet, most of the time. I do have one neighbor though that for some reason scoots a chair or stool across the floor about once every hour. The sound reverberates through my apartment, sounds like some kind of injured goose, and honestly has been a source of aggravation for me. "Why can't they pick it up and move it?" I ask several times a day. I'm working on experiencing it differently though. I have started using that goose call as a sign and reminder that outside of these four walls is a big world with lots of people struggling, lots of people scared, and lots of people doing amazing acts of love. Christ showed up to the disciples while they were in a sort of quarantine. Popped right through that door and announced peace, which I am sure actually initially freaked them out.... but then...peace. Christ is not hindered by how or where we gather. I look forward to the day, and actually have a list in my mind of the people I am going to hug. My mom being the first one. But until that day comes, and it will, I am going to stay hunkered down because that is the way I can show my love for the world. And when my neighbor scoots that stool, I am going to pray for you all. I am going to take that as a sign that Christ has entered, and I am going to prepare for what is next, because there is a whole new world coming and there is peace to be found there too.

*Phil*

Rev. Phil Hart  
Transitional Conference Minister  
Michigan Conference United Church of Christ