

December 5, 2020

To: The Members of the Central Association of the Iowa Conference

From: The Central Association Advisory Council (CAAC) and Committee on Ministry (COM)

Dear Beloved Members of the Central Association,

We hope that each of you and your congregations are doing as well as you can during this trying year. We know that our country, state, congregations, and members have dealt with a lot, maybe even too much, in 2020 and we are all feeling it. We are concerned about everyone's mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health during these times and hold you in our prayers.

On November 13, Executive Conference Minister Brigit Stevens shared a message via email and video to the members of the Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota Conferences regarding COVID-19. In the message, we are reminded that:

- all of our conference staff continue praying for all of us.
- we are to love God with our whole beings, and
- to love each other as ourselves.

Right now, to embody the teachings of Jesus, we need to keep distance between each other. We need to wear masks when we do have to go out. We need to make sure we are washing our hands often and well. We need to have patience with each other and ourselves. By doing these things we say "I love you as I love myself" and "your health and wellbeing matter to me." This is the gospel, lived out through us.

As the CAAC and COM, we are encouraging all Central Association congregations to follow the recommendations in ECM Stevens' message. We know that some congregations have been worshipping in person and we respect those decisions but as the pandemic progresses and the dangers become clearer, we are making a new/renewed ask. We ask that congregations please stop worshipping in person at least through January 2021. Even if your congregation has been worshipping with physical distance, masks, and other safety precautions, please stop worshipping in person until at least through January 2021. We need to do what we can to stop the spread of COVID-19 and the best way we know how is to not go out unless we must.

We are the United Church of Christ and we cannot mandate any of this. ECM Stevens shared, it is our responsibility, as leaders, to share what we think you should do. We know this is not what we want to hear or do, especially as we enter the Advent/Christmas season. We had hopes and plans for this season and many of those things will now not happen. Please take the time to grieve those things and the people who will be missed. But let us also find hope in new ways of being the Church together. Let us celebrate the creativity of new expressions of the Church that have arisen. Let us celebrate the work and energy so many put into learning new skills, finding equipment, and piecing things together so we can come together in whatever way(s) work.

We know that figuring out technology and purchasing equipment for being Church in different ways was not in many congregation's budgets. In an effort to support worship and other opportunities in each congregation, the CAAC and COM have put together a grant request form for the Association's congregations. Each congregation can request up to \$200 to pay for either one year of a Zoom account or to purchase equipment to assist in the recording/broadcasting of church worship and other events. If your congregation is interested in receiving grant money, please fill out the attached grant application with your request, that includes a description of how the money will be spent and contact information for the congregation.

The CAAC and COM will also be working to offer some online trainings in 2021 about how to start and/or improve virtual worship experiences and share other ideas about how to be Church. We will send out more information as soon as we get the details together.

Again, thank you for being Christ-like during this difficult year and please reach out to any of us on the CAAC or COM if you or your congregation need support and prayers.

Sincerely,

CAAC Members: Rev. Liz Colton, Rev. Joel Love, Rev. Amy Murray, Rev. David Raymond, Rev. John Noer, Jim Coppoc, Nancy Brown, Joyce Christianson, Rev. Kate West

COM Members: Rev. Kate West, Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm, Rev. Hannah Hannover, George Britton, Norm Van Klompenburg, Rev. Lindsey Braun, Debbie Gannon, John Ashby