

**DES MOINES OFFICE:**  
5609 DOUGLAS AVE  
DES MOINES, IA 50310  
515.277.6369



**IOWA, NEBRASKA  
& SOUTH DAKOTA**  
• C O N F E R E N C E S •  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**SIOUX FALLS OFFICE:**  
3500 S PHILLIPS AVE, STE 100  
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57105  
605.338.8738

January 16, 2021

Dear Friends of the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences of the UCC,

As followers of Jesus Christ, we endeavor to love God fully with our whole being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Loving our neighbors and ourselves, includes working to protect each other's safety, sense of belonging, and dignity.

Today, I reach out to you to urge you to not gather in-person in your buildings for worship or other activities this week in particular for two reasons:

1. Covid-19
2. Concerns of civil unrest

The Covid-19 virus continues to ravage our communities in the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences. As the vaccine rolls out across our states, it will be easy to let our guard down too quickly, without allowing time for the general population to be vaccinated or allowing time for the vaccine to fully take effect. Please, keep social distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands frequently, and staying away from groups of humans you don't live with for the time being.

Additionally, our national politics have revealed the intensity of division and stress in our communities. You may have seen the posts on social media last night and today from the national officers of the United Church of Christ. Legitimate and valid concerns have been communicated by FBI and other law enforcement officials in more than one of our UCC conferences acknowledging that both state government buildings and "liberal" churches have been identified as potential targets for continued civil unrest this week. These are unpredictable and anxious times we are living in.

As of today, there are no specific threats to congregations or clergy in the Iowa, Nebraska, or South Dakota UCC Conferences, that I am aware of. If that changes, I will notify the appropriate leaders and churches immediately.

However, it is on the side of utmost caution and care, that I share the encouragement of the national UCC officers, and ask you to not gather in person in your church buildings, this week in particular. Please continue your focus on loving your neighbor as yourselves, protecting the safety, belonging, and dignity of everyone.

Because every community is different, please check in with your local law enforcement to ask if specific threats or concerns have been raised in your area, and ask them how you may best care for your neighbors and yourselves.

Also remember that in times of civil unrest and community concerns, it is most often that black churches, Jewish synagogues and temples, and Islamic centers and mosques are the targets of violence and hate, not mainline churches. Please check in on these members of your community this week and offer your love and support. We are all stressed by the multiple concerns of our current times. Please keep watch and care for them as you keep watch and care for your own congregation as well.

And, care for your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. As the wise Rev. Sarah Lund, Director of UCC Disability Ministries shared with Conference Ministers in an email this morning,

Because the situation is unknown and alarming, it is common to feel overwhelmed, anxious, worried, afraid, and dread. These types of responses are common during traumatic events and our whole lives (for many of us) are a series of traumatic events. In response to trauma, it is common to respond by: fight, flight or freeze... We might want to deny the threat, ignore the threat, exaggerate the threat, or engage the threat in unhealthy ways, or we may shut down, withdraw and step away from ministry.

To care for your well-being, I remind you of the encouragement I sent on January 6<sup>th</sup> in response to the violence that erupted at the Capitol building in Washington, DC, it is still good advice. Please take breaks from the news and breathe. Hug your beloveds. Make space for big feelings, take a long hot shower, drink more water than alcohol, eat more vegetables than pastries, and remember who and whose you are. You are a beloved member of God's beautiful family, bearing God's very image in your being.

Below are links to resources from the national United Church of Christ and the Insurance Board to help you navigate decision making about action steps that may benefit your congregation best in the coming days. Be comforted by your faith and wise and attentive in your care and your love.

UCC Dos and Don'ts:

[https://www.ucc.org/amid-pre-inauguration-turmoil-ucc-leaders-suggest-dos-donts/?fbclid=IwAR2BubPJiCToa-kjNLIaWjx3X\\_yUs0MHE3RdThzMMIbiCZh6DvoWGO6MJI](https://www.ucc.org/amid-pre-inauguration-turmoil-ucc-leaders-suggest-dos-donts/?fbclid=IwAR2BubPJiCToa-kjNLIaWjx3X_yUs0MHE3RdThzMMIbiCZh6DvoWGO6MJI)

Insurance Board – Civil Unrest:

<https://www.insuranceboard.org/civil-unrest/>

Blessings,

Brigit

Executive Conference Minister

IA, NE, and SD Conferences of the UCC