



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Nebraska

237 South 70th Street, Suite 221
Lincoln, Nebraska 68510

Telephone: 402.476.0359
www.disciples-ne.org

Rev. Chris Morton
Regional Minister &
Cotner College Director
253-363-1599 (cell phone)
regmin@ccnebr.org

Carol Burnley
Administrative Assistant
adminasst@ccnebr.org

Teresa Olberding
Disciples Women's
Ministries
Coordinator
teresadwm@yahoo.com

Paul Few
Disciples Men's Ministries
Coordinator (Volunteer)
pefew@hotmail.com

Holly Gage
Youth Ministry
Coordinator
youthministrynebraska@gmail.com

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Dear Friends, Church Leaders, and Church Members ---

June 30th is nearly upon us as I greet you with the Peace and Love of God. Thank you for our relationship, and our communications. We are in a time filled with stress, fueled by uncertainty reflected in our growing sense of frustration, coupled with a desire to be together.

It's not a matter of "if" the church will gather in-person, but a question of "when" and "how?" I implore you to consider to not gather in-person for the foreseeable future. But I am also aware that our covenantal relationship honors and respects the integrity of the Local Church as, not independent, but autonomous. Local Church leaders throughout Nebraska are wrestling in each of their own communities with the question of "when and how shall we gather in-person again?" I honor your discerning God's desires for you to that question.

Each of you, individually and as a community of faith, are referencing resources that you find most helpful in your planning to gather together in-person. As you discern both when and how to worship together, please consider becoming "the hybrid church," as the walls of the sanctuary recede into people's homes thanks to our growing capacity to be church virtually. Particularly for the most vulnerable members of our churches, people over the age of 65 and people who have underlying health conditions, or co-morbidities.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services has updated their guidance for faith-based communities on June 19th (<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/COVID-19-Guidelines-for-the-Conduct-of-Faith-Based-Services.pdf>). Please note that our official government statement includes the language, "Faith leaders are responsible for the safety of those who attend services..." and then encourages "the elderly...and people with underlying conditions ..." **to stay home.**

You are being asked to consider what it means to be faithful in these times. The Church is not asking you what you believe to be the right thing socially or politically, but theologically and ecclesialogically. What does it mean *today* to be a safe, hospitable gathered community? What does *loving my neighbor* (who, in most of our pews are the elderly and people with underlying conditions) need to look like today?

To help you discern "how" to gather in-person again, I have put together the 24 questions that were included with the April 27th Letter to the Church. Those questions are broken into sections: Before Inviting Members to Gather; Inviting Members; Managing Members Gathering; and The Future of the Church Gathering (see attached). There are a myriad of additional resources that I'm sure you are consulting. The most important question, though, is who will be responsible for calling members into account if they are not following your established guidelines? Second to that is the question of who will decide if/when it is time to discontinue worshipping in-person?

The weight of the questions is heavy. The easy thing to do would be to quote Scripture (specifically Matthew 11: 28-30), but that would not be appropriate, nor helpful. Quotes, one-liners and clichés rarely scratch the itch they intend to assuage. As you carry the heaviness of your burden, please know that you are not alone. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a covenant church; we are all partners with one another. So, share your burden -- -with each other there, so that no one person is carrying this load alone, and with your neighbors here in the Region where we/they share your struggles.

Please continue to keep me, and the Regional Church, up-to-date on your thoughts, considerations, and decisions about moving forward with the question of “when and how” to gather in-person. Until then,

With God's Peace
Chris