



11816 Lomas Blvd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87112
505-255-8786
Toll Free 1-800-678-8786
Fax 505-265-6184

Friday, March 13, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues in Ministry,

I've received multiple emails, phone calls, and text messages from a number of you asking for guidance from the Conference in how best to respond to the coronavirus/COVID-19.

First of all, let me share with you that while much of this was happening this past week, I was on a much-needed spiritual retreat with little communication or contact with the "outside world," so I apologize if my non-responses during this anxious time made it seem as if I were unavailable or out of touch with your concerns. I am so very grateful to have had the time apart, and, honestly, feel as if I'm in a better place and frame of soul and mind to serve you during this time as a result of my time away. So, I thank you for your forbearance.

Secondly, I want to affirm the deeply pastoral work many of you have already engaged in to make the best decisions on behalf of your congregations and your communities. Some of you have opted to cancel all activities (except worship) for a period of time, some are cancelling everything (including worship), and some of you are simply making prudent modifications to your activities and programs (such as more frequent deep-cleaning/sanitization and changes to passing of the peace and how you celebrate Holy Communion). I want you to know that I trust you to make the best decisions on behalf of your people and communities and from what I've seen and heard, you are all doing excellent work and communicating your decisions and plans very, very well.

As regards cancelling worship services, I'm profoundly conflicted about this. The act of gathering for worship could, on one hand, be a powerful and prophetic witness of hope in the midst of chaos and anxiety, but it could also be a risky act, especially for those most vulnerable. For these reasons, I fully support those of you who (working with your local leadership team) feel as if you should cancel worship for a week or more. At the same time, I fully support those of you who have come to the opposite conclusion and are proceeding with worship and programming with specific modifications (sanitization, deep-cleaning, changes to passing of the peace/greeting time and celebration of Holy Communion). I do not think there is a single, best response for all of our congregations and all of our communities.

Let me also offer a handful of additional thoughts during this uncertain time:

- For those who would like to explore means for offering worship online (livestreaming, Facebook live, YouTube, etc.), our Communications Director Alli Newsom has resources that will support you in that and will be sharing those in the days to come. You may also want to reach out to Alli (alli@nmconfum.com) via email in the next few days to begin that conversation one-on-one;
- I would also encourage you to find and use simple, low-tech ways to maintain contact with your congregations and community—phone calls, text messages, email, and social media can be a lifeline to people who feel disconnected from others during this time (and can be a critical means of finding out if people need help with childcare, meals, etc.);

- With cancellation of schools and events, some of our community members may find themselves in sudden, greater need for resources such as food pantries. If you provide such ministries in your local congregation, please consider your preparedness for an increase in demand. Further, if you find that you need greater support (volunteers, donations) for this work, please communicate that with your nearby colleagues and with our office to find ways to make sure that this vital witness and ministry of the Church can continue;
- The leadership of our CCYM/ROC camp has decided that cancelling the March 27-29 event at Sacramento is the wisest decision for our children and youth. You should have already seen this announcement, but over-communication during this time is a risk we should be willing to take;
- In conversation with our Conference Disaster Relief Coordinator, we will be working to offer some broad guidelines for preparedness, cleaning/sanitization, and coordination of efforts conference-wide in the days to come. One such resource is available from the Centers for Disease Control [here](#). Updates will be available on the Annual Conference website (www.nmconfum.com).
- Lastly, this topic will be on the agenda of the New Mexico/Northwest Texas Cabinet meeting next week, so further communications may be forthcoming. Stay tuned.

To conclude, let me thank you again for your patience these past few days. I know that this has been a trying, uncertain time for all of us and I want to unequivocally affirm the excellent work that many of you have done and are doing to make the best decisions for your congregations and communities. I am ever more humbled to work alongside such great leadership in our Conference. If you feel like you need any further guidance or conversation with me (or even if you just need to “think out loud” how to lead during this time), you can always call, email, or text me (see below)—I am fully on duty these next couple of weeks.

I’m mindful of one of my favorite passages of scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7 (“for God has not given us a spirit of fear. . .”). These are fear-inducing times for our people, for our communities, for all of us in leadership. At the same time, we can (and should!) take courage. Hear how Eugene Peterson translated the last portion of that verse in *The Message*: “God doesn’t want us to be shy with His gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.” Friends, we have been given extraordinary gifts of witness and ministry to our world even (especially) in the midst of this great uncertainty. Let us not be shy with them, let us be bold, and loving, and sensible.

In Christ,



Randall W. Partin, Provost
New Mexico Annual Conference
randall@nmconfum.com
505-255-8786 (office)
575-309-8876 (mobile)