

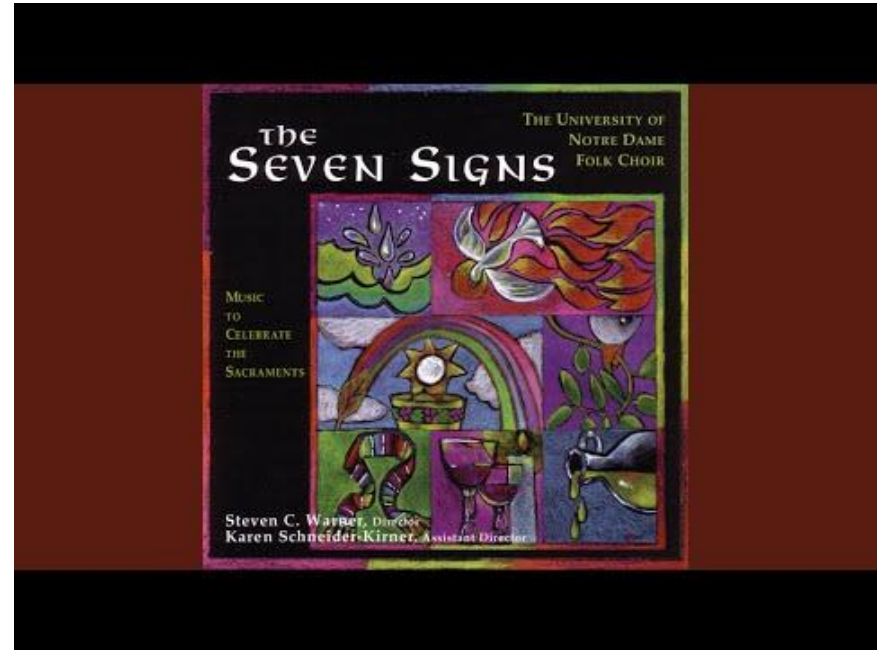
Learning from One Another During this Season of COVID-19

**Reflections from Central District Conference
Pastors and Staff based on ZOOM meetings
on March 17.**

**Click the “play”
button for music.**

Welcome CDC pastors
and congregational
leaders. Please take a
moment to take some
deep breaths and find
your center.

You are a beloved
Child of Creator God.



*Our Lord said that all would be well, all manner of things would be well.
With all the sadness wrought in this world, the good shall always prevail.
In all the doubts that shroud simple truths, we pray for the wisdom of God.
Give us the faith to trust in your love, when things are concealed from our view.
Our faith is firm and stands on the Word, the Word that endures for all time.
And so we pray to trust in the hope that all manner of things shall be well.*

Observations and Words of Counsel

- Practice self-care! Use those spiritual disciplines that center and ground you!
- Stay reliably informed but don't go too deep in the weeds of politics and policy. Checking news 2-3 times a day is enough.
- Listen and heed the counsel of the government. This should guide your decisions on cancelling events. Follow CDC guidelines. The threat of a “peak” or “spike” in COVID-19 gets my attention.
- Communicate. With your family, with your congregational leaders, with your vulnerable ones. Clarify who is the communicator.
- Stay connected to community leaders and other religious leaders in your community. As Glen Guyton says, “Bring the Peace” to your community. Strange partnerships will likely save us!
- Laugh! Use your close connection to the CDC to your benefit!
- Sleep!

How do we maintain community and connection?

- Who are the most isolated and threatened in your congregation and community? Who has multiple layers of safety-net or circles of care and who doesn't?
- Paoli Mennonite has “circles of care” that all members are part of. Once a week the leader of each circle reports to the pastor (or lay leader during their transition.)
- Hively Mennonite: The congregation has been divided into 3-4 groups and deacons are assigned a group to check in with, focusing on the most vulnerable in their groups. They also have volunteers writing and sending cards and notes to people.
- Madison Mennonite: Offering one hour daily ZOOM check-ins for anyone who wants to join.
- Chicago Community Mennonite: Developed a “buddy system” and geographical groups with between 5-15 households in each group with a point person for each group. Also checked with parents with children to see if there is interest in an online “catechism class.”

How do we maintain community and connection?

- Raleigh Mennonite: Leadership team divided up the directory and did a household check in with brief survey; physical needs, interest in online Bible study, ZOOM pastoral care?
- FMC Wadsworth: developed a spreadsheet with everyone's names and record of who has been contacted and when.
- Assembly Mennonite: Created two Google Doc forms that people can respond to; Prayer requests and interest in participating in a buddy system (Who wants a buddy and who is willing to be a buddy.)
- Faith Mennonite: Provided a caroling style hymn sing outside the window of a person isolated in a nursing home.

How do you know what people need? Ask. Listen. Watch.

- Those who are not technologically as savvy may receive help from a volunteer to get them set up with ZOOM or other technology.
- Don't forget to reach out to health care providers in your congregations who are under significant stress.
- Some expressed concern that they might plan multiple "great" activities and then no one will participate. Don't be afraid to test your ideas with others before implementing.

Visiting in Hospitals, Nursing Homes and Prisons

- Check in with local providers before showing up.
- Doug heard of one clergy person being denied visitation with a person on hospice but doubtful this is common.
- Think through how you will provide funerals during this season.
Small family graveside service with a memorial service at a later time?
- Don't forget the prison population and the increased isolation they are experiencing. Visitation restrictions are in place for them as well.

More Directive Leadership may be needed

- Move from a “volunteer” to “voluntold” mentality when needed. You know your congregation the best and who might be able to respond to a need. Don’t hold back in asking for volunteers. Most people want to help during a crisis.
- Encourage people to ask themselves what they have to offer.

Financial Concerns are real

- Invite generosity from those who have resources to share. Release those with limited resources from financial giving to the church. Focus on basic needs: food, clothing, medical supplies, shelter. Other thoughts?
- Check with local utility companies to see what “grace” they are offering on paying bills during this season.
- Stay informed about what the Federal Government is offering.
- Faith Mennonite: A teenager is providing childcare for a single parent. Another member of the congregation is paying the teen for the childcare services.

Financial Concerns are real

- Find out what resources are in the community and how these resources are being distributed; food banks, medical clinics, COVID-19 testing, etc.
- Local transitional housing services may need food services and may be accepting food donations.

Decision-making in the congregation

- Crises require more directive leadership. Exercise your pastoral authority. Sometimes you might have to ask for forgiveness later...and people will likely be gracious.
- Follow governmental guidance regarding gatherings.
- Error on the cautious side when considering in-person meetings.
- As of March 16, several CDC congregations are planning at least eight weeks of alternative worship and programming.
- Meet via ZOOM and conference call as much as possible.

How long...O Lord?

- It's really hard to plan when things change daily. It would be awesome to be back together for Easter Sunday...but don't plan on it at this point. This may be an extended Holy Saturday season. What gifts do we find in Holy Saturday?
- I'd suggest making alternative worship plans 3-4 weeks in advance and reassess as you go along.
- Invite musicians to prepare special music for worship that can be either recorded or done live from their location.
- Is this what the Psalmists meant when they cried, "How long, O Lord?"

What about Easter???

- Raleigh Mennonite is thinking of moving Easter back to the first Sunday when the congregation meets again in person.
- Some are planning a mini-Easter online and a big Easter when they return. **Easter is a season...**
- Madison Mennonite is looking out toward Pentecost and building worships toward the (re)birth of the church.

Technology

- Grace used [Facebook Live](#) on March 15.
- Shalom Community used [WebX](#) on March 15.
- Chicago Community and others used [ZOOM](#) for worship.
- FMC Bluffton posts recorded services to [Vimeo](#).

Alison Calessa Brookins developed a ZOOM cheat sheet. It is available at <https://mcusacdc.org/covid-19-coronavirus-resources/>

Onelicense is granting gratis access during the crisis

<https://news.onelicense.net/2020/03/13/one-license-offers-gratis-licenses-to-help-cope-with-covid-19-challenges-vali-d-through-april-15/?fbclid=IwAR2d8pydwjp7-hjkbPr0wSMQMUwHbQvONIfvv9OMZE5g2O2rwwq87-OTbZc>

Check the Central District Conference Website

[COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Resources](#)

During my prayer of blessing at the end of a licensing or ordination service I often include the words,

God, you have not promised that the way will always be clear, or easy, or immediately fulfilling. But you have promised to be faithful, to never leave our side and to extend your loving-kindness forever and ever.

May this be so! May the God of Hope, Christ Jesus the Incarnate One and Lady Wisdom bless you with courage as you wade into these troubled waters. Amen and Amen!

