



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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A PASTORAL LETTER REGARDING WORSHIP & COMMUNITY PRACTICE FROM THE HEARTLAND CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

August 24, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we write to you the longed-for horizon marking the end of COVID continues to feel distant. As you know, the Delta variant is causing a daily rise in reported cases and our hospitals are again being stretched to their maximum capacity to care for those who are ill. The weariness continues as we wonder, "How long will this go on?" Of course, there are no easy answers to this question. There are some simple and important strategies, however, that continue to show promise as ways to shorten Delta's deadly detour away from full recovery.

In some ways these practices are nothing new, but we felt it would be helpful to name them again as the Delta variant demands ongoing intentionality of practice to mitigate Delta's deadly impact. We remind you of them here:

- **Doctors widely urge that all who can get vaccinated should get vaccinated.** This has been shown to significantly lower the impact of the Delta variant. Those without vaccination are at a much higher risk of COVID contraction and death. While those who have been vaccinated may still get the Delta variant, its impact is lessened, and death is much less likely.
- **Wearing masks for indoor gatherings** continues to be an important practice to mitigate the spread of COVID.
- **Six feet of physical distance** is still the ideal when groups gather in-person who are not part of your regular daily social bubble.
- **Regular hand washing (for at least 20 seconds) and not touching one's mouth, eyes or nose** is an important practice to prevent the virus from entering one's body.

We recognize that each congregation has unique circumstances when it comes to sanctuary size and how the Delta variant of COVID is moving through any given community. This means that local discernment will continue to be a vital part of your congregation's considerations regarding practice of in-person gathering. All of the resources we have shared in prior letters can be accessed by going to the Heartland Conference COVID 19 resources page by clicking [here](#).

Please know that we understand and feel the weariness which this long season has created. Also know that **each of our settings has made the decision that fall gatherings of the Associations and the Conference will all be virtual** (including the Conference Annual Gathering, previously announced as in-person or online). While such decisions are never easy to make, we feel they are in the best interest of the health and care of all concerned. Also know that we hold you in our prayers and are glad to offer support in worship leadership or for conversation as that may be helpful.

Blessings on you!

The Heartland Conference Leadership Roundtable Members: David Long-Higgins (Transitional Conference Minister), Daniel Busch (Northwest Association Minister), Patricia Battle (Central Southeast Association Minister), Nayiri Karjian (Living Water One General Minister), and Carl Robinson (Southwest Ohio Northern Kentucky Association Designated Minister)

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