



# PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Empowering churches to proclaim the reconciling love of Christ.

## A Message from PCC

**April 22, 2020**

**Dear Friends of Penn Central Conference -**

*You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. (Isaiah 48:6)*

There is great mystery in these times. As scientific knowledge of the coronavirus grows, we learn more about its strangeness. How it infects people who can carry it and never have any symptoms, while others succumb quickly and with deadly results. We struggle with trying to learn how to function as we never have before – with families both functional and dysfunctional, in employment and unemployment, in hoarding and in hunger. Questions proliferate, while answers seem elusive. We realize that simple rituals of daily living are no longer simple. And we feel a shaking of our foundations.

The changes to church life have been immense. I imagine our buildings sitting empty. There is quiet in the halls and parking lots dotted with leaves. Yesterday a colleague cried while telling me of how she cannot stand the thought of the empty sanctuary. The grief catches her off-guard. Members of our congregations speak of driving by their churches, just to see and feel close to the place they love. This time of upheaval is breaking our worlds open – even when we are more closed-in in terms of physical space.

Some writers have encouraged us to see this as enforced Sabbath and to see how our new schedules can be perceived as a gift. How the extra time for family and hobbies can enrich us. How this may be a time to re-think priorities and directions. I will not be one of those writers. Not when I know that millions do not experience unemployment as a gift, or chronic hunger and economic fragility as enriching.

But I do know this. I know that for some of us, we are being pushed (or forced) into looking at the world in a new way. Pushed out of our regular rituals and out of our sanctuaries, we might consider how we have depended so heavily on those buildings and rituals. Provocative questions that reflect upheaval percolate in

me: When the sanctuary is empty, where is evidence of the church? When a preacher cannot stand in the pulpit and speak to upturned faces, how do we share the power of the Word? When the communion bread is in our own hands at our own table at home, how is last supper experienced? When the pastor is suddenly equal on the Zoom screen with everyone else, how do we think about authority and leadership? These questions call out for reflection. They invite deep conversation and theological engagement. The shaking of our foundations includes grief and fear. But the cracks and questions that emerge demand attention. Isaiah wrote the words above after Jerusalem was destroyed, when destruction seemed complete. Yet God was with them and doing a new thing. Even when they could not see it. Hear the prophet's voice: I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?.

**Peace,**

**Carrie**

## Prayers for Penn Central Conference

**Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)**

*Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

**Pleasant Hill Chapel UCC, Jonestown**

**St. John's UCC, Jonestown**

**Church of the Apostles UCC, Lancaster**

**Faith UCC, Lancaster**



