

Dear colleagues and congregations,

Zora Neale Hurston reminds us that “there are years that ask questions and those that answer.” As we enter the third year of living with the Coronavirus, we hope to be shifting into a year that begins to answer. It has been exhausting, holding the grief, continuing to ask, how do we “do” ministry safely and well, and how do we attend to all that demands our attention. Our clergy have felt this acutely. And as the Church comes around to the end of the Lenten season, clergy are not likely to catch their breath with Omicron and the ever-changing pandemic recommendations.

This year, it is particularly important that your congregational leadership be attentive to the challenges, losses, and accommodations made in light of what everyone has experienced. It is a season where intentional time off is essential and more frequent check in conversations are recommended beyond your typical annual reviews.

In the short term, this looks like checking in with your authorized ministers to see how they are doing. What do they need from the wider church? Have they been able to take their allotted time off? What other support services are available? Can we supply leadership so that our local church clergy can take the Sunday after Easter off as an additional day away?

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed and exacerbated places of pain and injustice throughout our institutions and communities, and clergy have borne the weight of this. Within this revealing is a need for our wider church - judicatory staff, COMs, to provide local resources, support good discernment around vocation, and name best practices for assessing staffing and ministry models.

Included here are links to resources for you to share, and to help you engage in conversations about how your conference and association can look at the systemic issues and opportunities for support.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches continues to offer a wealth of excellent resources related to re-entry and the affects of Covid-19 on clergy and faith communities. Another from the Wisconsin Council of Churches - this shows their research on the impact on ministry.

<https://www.wichurches.org/tag/covid-19/>

This article lists mental health resources in WI and across the country.

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/05/22/mental-health-resources/>

This article provides a window into Massachusetts General Hospital and the steps they have taken to diminish burnout among staff. Their learnings are transferable to Associations and COMs.

<https://hbr.org/2021/02/six-lessons-on-fighting-burnout-from-bostons-biggest-hospital?fbclid=IwAR0uG9NXyLaX7zbpwhleanK03qkz8v2wK2QOafADcgl1KdJQjJNjSN6h4o>

Our sibling denomination has a wealth of clergy resources on these pages.
<https://disciples.org/dns/disciples-and-covid-19/clergy-resources-for-crisis-and-trauma/>

This BBC lens offers a way forward to healing.
<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210203-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-how-will-we-heal>

Secondary trauma is real amongst our clergy, particularly in our chaplains. This unpacks the pain experienced.
<https://faithandleadership.com/jessica-young-brown-who-cares-shepherds-secondary-trauma-faith-leaders-must-be-addressed?fbclid=IwAR0UfMaouico5TvyijibqYsJKDjBtWg4HtRHQBvMNhhPSH6KEDiZ8UaQ-9s>

Another excellent article looking ahead to the weight of grief.
https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/11/opinions/covid-19-grief-wave-is-coming-perry/index.html?fbclid=IwAR3oVlp-AMc5WV_vFnTfJ_GGRnctqmKf11TrJ1b7C7v9sg2OfUb9ntU0HmM

Thank you for your faithful service to the church and your communities. You have continued to make a difference, to be present, to adapt and change in these incredibly difficult times.

My prayers continue to surround you. May you know the presence of God, the MESA team, and the many settings of the United Church of Christ.

Godspeed,
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