Greetings to our United Church of Christ family and friends,

We write to inform the body of an important and historic action taken by the United Church of Christ Board. After a long season of prayerful discernment, and by unanimous consent, the UCCB has elected to operate a virtual General Synod in 2021.

In this week of Pentecost, we remember the power of the Holy Spirit to "create and renew the church of Jesus Christ" and to "bind in covenant people of faith of all ages, tongues, and races." In the United Church of Christ, we testify to the Holy Spirit's power to animate and bless the church even when we are unable to gather in person. We have experienced God's faithfulness in this way since the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virus has caused the delay, cancelation, and reimagination of many large-scale events. The National Setting staff and United Church of Christ Board have been monitoring events closely as we approach General Synod 33 in the summer of 2021. While an event still nearly 15 months away may seem too distant to worry with, we must think first about the health and safety of our church family in considering options for gathering in person. An early decision about how to conduct General Synod next summer is a practice of good stewardship that will limit our financial liabilities and expand options for planning our church's important biennial meeting whatever public health conditions may bring one year from now.

In a special meeting on June 2, 2020, the United Church of Christ Board met via Zoom to consider options for General Synod 33 in light of COVID-19. Factoring heavily into our discernment is the likelihood that COVID-19 will be an ongoing presence in our country requiring our continued vigilance to assure the safety of our neighbors. We anticipate that an in-person General Synod would require social distancing and other protocols to minimize the risk of Coronavirus transmission. Planning for General Synod in Kansas City next year has already been strained by uncertainties about travel and lodging. We also understand that financial constraints and health precautions will prevent some of our conferences from fielding delegations to General Synod. We were reluctant to proceed with plans for a meeting in-person that would risk not achieving a quorum.

For these reasons, the United Church of Christ Board (UCCB) took the painful and unprecedented step of cancelling an in-person General Synod 33. Instead, we are putting our trust in the Holy Spirit's power to bind the church together. We will proceed with a virtual gathering of our church family and we have asked the staff of the National Setting to spend the coming months preparing for General Synod to take place in a digital format.

Church family, we invite you to dream and envision what a virtual General Synod might be. While we are saddened that we will be unable to meet together in Kansas City, we also see this as an opportunity for spiritual and ecclesial growth. The UCCB and the National Setting staff are excited to explore this digital frontier and we are encouraged by the positive experiences that other denominations and institutions have already had in hosting large digital events since the pandemic touched our common life. We are committed to making General Synod 33 a holy, engaging, and inspiring gathering of our church complete with worship, theological reflection, opportunities for connection, and the regular business of the church. We want to be clear that a digital General Synod in 2021 does not represent a

permanent change in format, but we are excited to see what we may learn and how we may grow through this experience. Indeed, we believe we can reach many more of our UCC family and friends who are often unable to travel to our traditional 5-day event. Updates will be posted on www.ucc.org and Keeping You Posted (KYP). Many hours of planning lay ahead. We are confident this is the appropriate decision given the circumstances today.

For assistance in arriving at a timely decision in the midst of many unknowns, the UCCB extends our gratitude, especially, to General Minister and President John Dorhauer, Associate General Minister Karen Georgia Thompson, the National Setting staff, and the Council of Conference Ministers. We wish you all good health and we pray that by the grace and power of Pentecost we will see you virtually in 2021 at General Synod 33.

Peace of Christ be with you all,

Yvette Wynn	Rev. Dr. Cameron Barr
Chair	Vice-Chair
Rev. Penny Lowes	Robert Sandman
Moderator	Assistant Moderator