

"After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone." -Matthew 14:23

Dear Authorized Ministers and Those Who Care For Them,

In love, we write from our hearts to yours recognizing the great stress and fatigue COVID has created and continues to create for you who are authorized ministers in this Gospel work to which we have all been called. We recognize that all who carry leadership in the life of the church whether ordained or lay have felt the enormous weight and challenge of this ongoing season, as have so many in other areas of life. Still, we are aware that there is a particular burden, often unseen by many, that you who serve in authorized ministry carry because of the inherently relational nature of ministry. We see you, and we hear your weariness and often discouragement. We also love you and hold you in our prayers.

As such we are aware that there is a need to tend to the particular needs of you who serve as our authorized ministers so that your spirits may be renewed and so that the long-term health of God's mission manifest in the many expressions of the church may be strengthened. The collective care of all our Conferences and indeed the church in every setting compels us to offer a word of encouragement regarding the need for care in ways that give space for rest and rejuvenation; clarity and the renewal of one's calling.

While we recognize that resources vary widely throughout the settings of our shared life, there are several suggestions we would offer for consideration by local congregations and other settings of ministry.

- First, we urge you to intentionally pray for your leaders and the renewal they may need.
- Second, we encourage you to give permission and blessing for two consecutive weeks away for renewal leave, not counted as vacation time. This time alone will not be enough to process all that has happened or continues to happen in the life of the church but it will offer space for a new ground to be cultivated to engage in ongoing practices of self-care, necessary for sustained and life-giving ministry.
- Third, we encourage you to trust that your setting of ministry will not be diminished by this time away but rather strengthened by it.

Such suggestions as we offer may inevitably give rise to questions like, "Who will lead worship?" or among authorized ministers, "Can I be away?" "Won't this just be more work in order to take leave?" Because our desire is to diminish stress and not increase it, attached to this letter we are offering resources and suggestions for your use to help minimize the temptation of such questions to resist the renewal time we are urging.

We realize that making arrangements for such time away may require additional encouragement and we stand ready to be present in that regard. We are aware that already many excellent leaders have left the ministry due to the weight of COVID's impact on ministry alongside the other many stressors at work in the world at this time in history. For this reason, we feel it is especially important to care for the treasure which is you, our authorized leaders. Grief and loss are inherent in this season. Some of us even feel shame, which is a burden that we need not carry. We are hopeful that this time away helps you reconnect deeply with your call and with God, who loves you.

May this commitment we share bear a fruit of renewal for such a time as this.

Blessings and Godspeed,

The Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ
The Council of Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ