

Summary

Over four weeks in July 2020, I interviewed 23 individuals representing congregations across the state of Vermont. My research focused primarily on the congregations in the Northeast Association of the Vermont Conference UCC.

How is Sunday worship conducted?

- Email, Zoom, and pre-recorded video are the three primary ways Sunday worship is being conducted.
- Technological concerns were prevalent, yet the transition to digital ministry allowed for incredible creativity.
- Three congregations had resumed in-person worship in their sanctuary, as of July 2020.

Were changes made to Stewardship due to the pandemic?

- Most congregations were staying on budget for the year.
- Special offerings and denominational giving, like the UCC Five for Five, had not been regularly collected during the pandemic.
- Some major fundraising events were being adapted to online fundraisers or outdoor social distanced activities.

How is pastoral care provided while social distancing?

- Most ministers shared that at the beginning of the pandemic, from March to May, they spent more time than usual on pastoral care.
- Phone calls became a primary way to conduct pastoral care and some clergy conducted porch visits.
- Other creative forms of pastoral care were card ministries, meeting congregants for walks outside, and dropping off small gifts.

Are clergy at risk of burnout?

- Clergy recognized a steep learning curve at the beginning of the pandemic that could have led to burnout. By July, many clergy had “shift[ed] from crisis phase to maintenance phase” in their ministry.
- Taking time off for vacation remains an important way for clergy to avoid burning out. Regular self-care practices are incredibly valuable when traveling is not possible.
- One minister identified “compassion fatigue,” similar to burnout, as a problem he faced.

How are local feeding ministries impacted?

- Most churches who provided community meals have put them on hold due to the new health and safety protocols required.
- Church leadership are preparing for a greater need in the future. Direct assistance from the federal government kept local food shelves from being overwhelmed from March to July.
- Some congregations created partnerships with local community organizations and farmers in order to provide additional food distributions.

*This is a summary of a full report written by Laura Kisthardt.
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