

October 1, 2009

Dear Friends and Partners in Ministry,

We can hear the voices of our parents, teachers, and mentors echoing in the back of our minds.

“Be prepared.”

This spring, reports of cases of the H1N1 virus, popularly known as “The Swine Flu,” raised our concerns as a nation about the vulnerability of individuals and communities to a viral pandemic. As flu season begins, the potential of H1N1 to spread through our communities has many congregations asking how to best prepare for prevention, treatment, and mobilizing for pastoral needs, should the predictions come true.

The Church was called by Christ to offer healing to the sick. In the case of the H1N1 virus, healing involves countering sensationalist reports, presenting accurate information on prevention and finding ways to prepare for the possibility of an outbreak. Rev. J. George Reed, Executive Director of the North Carolina Council of Churches and a member of the NC Division of Public Health and NC Institute of Medicine Task Force on Ethics and Pandemic Influenza Planning, authored an article on responding to influenza outbreaks in 2006, when concerns about the H5N1 “Avian Flu” were at their peak<sup>1</sup>. He emphasized that communities of faith can best prepare by first being aware that our ministries of healing and hope include *preparing for*—not just reacting to—outbreaks of H5N1 and other viruses. Though this article does not deal specifically with H1N1, the point it makes is important--we need to be present at the table as our communities make contingency plans, so we can work congregationally to develop firm plans for how to respond.

We also recommend that churches share basic helpful prevention and public health information with their members. Helping to minimize infection in your communities by placing liquid hand sanitizer in church kitchens and fellowship halls, discerning when it is appropriate to suspend practices such as sharing communion cups and holding hands and cancelling events when many people are ill are all “best practices” we may want to consider. Week of Compassion’s partner organization, Church World Service, offers resources that are congregationally specific at [www.churchworldservice.org/h1n1](http://www.churchworldservice.org/h1n1). The Center for Disease Control offers a variety of important resources, including information for prevention, vaccination development, what to do if you contract H1N1, and how to provide care for others who contract H1N1. This may be found at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1).



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(Disciples of Christ)

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As we strive to be *a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world*, it is important that we proclaim hope when people live in fear. Likewise, as we seek to engage in ministry that meets the real needs of people in their day-to-day circumstances, we must take the advice of those trained in medicine, public health and health advocacy. It is important that we combine common sense with our compassion for one another. Preventing a crisis is as important in ministry as caretaking is in the midst of one.

Know that our prayers go with you in your work. Please let us know if there are other ways we can support you in H1N1 outbreak preparedness, or if there are strategies that you have found helpful.

Blessings in your exciting, vibrant ministries. Thank you for all you do to create peace where there is discord and hope where there is hurt.

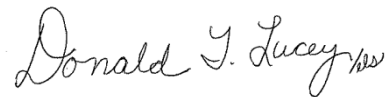
In Christ,



Sharon E. Watkins  
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Rev. Amy C. Gopp  
Executive Director, Week of Compassion



Donald T. Lucey, M.D.  
First Vice Moderator, 1997 – 1999 Biennium

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<sup>i</sup> [http://nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/health\\_care/Reed\[1\].pdf](http://nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/health_care/Reed[1].pdf)