At the invitation of denominational leaders, Interfaith Alliance of Iowa facilitated the organization and distribution of the April 28 statement and its re-release on May 7, including an additional introductory statement (see attached).

The joint statement is from the denominational leaders and should be attributed to their united effort.

Denominational Leaders remain united urging Iowa congregations to refrain from in-person gatherings despite visit to Iowa from Vice President on Friday

On April 28, twenty-one denominational leaders from ten denominations from across Iowa issued a joint statement regarding Governor Kim Reynolds proclamation on April 27 to allow congregations to gather in-person despite the continued spread of COVID-19. The joint statement urged congregations to refrain from in-person gatherings, including worship.

On Friday, May 8, Vice President Mike Pence is expected to be in Iowa to urge faith leaders to open up churches for worship. The denominational leaders remain committed to their statement from April 28 and continue to urge congregations to refrain from in-person gatherings.

Two denominational leaders offer additional statements on remaining committed to the joint statement urging congregations to refrain from in-person gatherings:

“In the midst of long lines at food pantries, long lines in the emergency rooms, and long lines in the grocery stores, we lament our losses, but we also rise up to the challenge as people of faith to care for all those who are suffering at this time,” stated Bishop Laurie Haller, Iowa Conference of The United Methodist Church. “As our national leaders live in denial of the extent of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we stand strong in diligently practicing social distancing and refraining from in-house worship at the same time as we advocate for the safety of those who are most vulnerable: the elderly, the poor, our health care professionals, the immigrant workers in our meat-packing plants, and our farmers, whose very
livelihoods are threatened. This is what God requires of us: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with our God. We can do this together."

“My Christian faith calls me to live into God’s extravagant welcome so that all may know love, safety, belonging, and dignity,” stated Rev. Brigit Stevens, Executive Conference Minister; Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota UCC Conferences. “These days, I continue to make the choice to stay home as much as possible, and encourage others to do the same, because I know that many don’t have the luxury of that choice. We are living our faith by protecting those most vulnerable to illness and death by doing whatever we can to slow the spread of the virus. In these times of Covid-19 pandemic, our buildings may be closed, but our churches are as vibrant and active as ever.”

The statement from April 28 signed by the twenty-one denominational leaders is attached. An introductory paragraph addressing the current visit by Vice President Mike Pence has been added to the statement by the denominational leaders:

As church denominational leaders, representing more than 1.2 million Christians throughout the state of Iowa, we are grateful for the opportunity provided by the upcoming visit of Vice President Mike Pence to re-issue and recommit to our position regarding in-person gatherings of faith communities, whether for worship or group ministries.

With one voice, we want to assure the Vice President that Iowa’s denominational leaders are currently working closely with local faith leaders in developing plans for when it becomes time to gather again in person. That time is likely to arrive in waves, reflecting regional diversity, with particular attention given to safe practices and a close observation of the scientific and local data on the spread of this coronavirus.

We continue to abide unanimously to our statement of April 28th, which we re-issue at this time.

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