

To the beloved community of faith in Champaign-Urbana, wherever you may worship:

Our varying faith traditions each celebrate the sacred and precious value of community. Our sages, teachers, and prophets enshrined in our holy writings the ideal of gathering in congregations to pray with others. They understood that in so doing, we can best hold one another up in times of trial, rejoice together in times of celebration, and continually aspire to the highest version of ourselves.

At the same time, religion has placed a supreme value on the sanctity of human life. If we have the opportunity to preserve the life and well-being of another, we must take that responsibility seriously.

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, is a global pandemic. It has challenged us to think and behave in ways that are not taught in seminaries, nor recorded in our sacred scriptures. We find ourselves compelled to invent programming, ritual, and sometimes even liturgy to address the unique needs of this moment.

All of us believe in God's great power to heal and save. All of us also believe that God has imbued scientists and medical practitioners with incredible skills and knowledge that will allow them to track this virus and develop appropriate protocols for responding to it. That these protocols warn against group gatherings and dictate social isolation is upsetting, for it disrupts the rhythms of our religious practice. But these measures, though unpalatable, are necessary to contain the spread of this pandemic and, ultimately, to save lives. Our places of worship have taken their cue from data-driven science, and we will continue to follow the advice of the health department. We feel that to do otherwise would be tantamount to a desecration of God's Name.

Easter will happen whether we celebrate communally or individually. So will Passover, Ramadan, and Ridvan. Christ's resurrection, the Israelite Exodus, the revelation of the Holy Quran, and Bahá'u'lláh's arrival at the Ridván Garden will continue to be eternal and essential truths for our faiths, regardless of whether, how, or when they are commemorated. We believe that regardless of the name that our individual traditions may use to address God, God is full of mercy and love. At this season celebrating themes of rebirth and freedom and charity toward others, may we live, celebrate, and worship in a manner that affirms and preserves the precious gift of life we have been given.

In love and faith,

[Signatures here]