



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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### **Gov. Northam's Dec. 10 Executive Order Means Modest Changes for Virginia Annual Conference Churches**

On Thursday, December 10, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam issued [Executive Order 72](#) (EO 72) which instituted new, temporary restrictions due to the recent surge in COVID-19 cases throughout Virginia. EO 72 goes into effect at 12:01 a.m. on Monday, December 14, 2020.

For churches in the Virginia Annual Conference, there are two notable impacts that change our practices.

- 1) Many non-worship gatherings at churches are now limited to 10 individuals. That means Sunday School, Youth Groups, Board of Trustees meetings, live nativities, etc. Other groups that use the church building are also limited to 10 or fewer people. The exceptions are to provide essential services for low-income residents (e.g., food pantries, homeless ministries with persons being lodged at the church, etc.) and for education instruction (e.g., preschool, Christian day school).
- 2) If a church is planning a late service for Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve, the service must be concluded so that all members and guests can be home by midnight. The reason for this is there is a new stay at home order from midnight to 5:00 a.m.

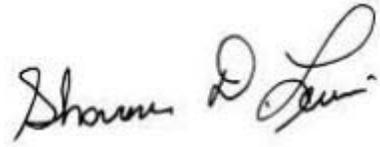
Importantly, the new gathering size limitation **does not apply to worship services**. Remember, an indoor service is limited to 50 percent capacity of the sanctuary, chapel, or fellowship hall. However, the new gathering size limitation **does apply** to all other gatherings a church may sponsor, with the limited exception for ministries working with low-income residents of the Commonwealth, and for schools, as noted above.

Churches conducting in-person services must follow the [Technical Assistance Manual](#) (TAM), including health acknowledgement, distancing, and face coverings for all participants, together with leaders. Please review your approved plans and ensure that all the provisions are being strictly observed. The health acknowledgement, distancing, and face covering provisions are also part of EO 72.

If you have not already done so, please review the recently-released document on [what to do in a COVID resurgence](#) with your Healthy Church Team and church leaders. There are many additional helpful resources on the Conference web page [here](#).

Thank you for your faithfulness, adaptability, and leadership in these extraordinary conditions. We are all looking forward to a time in the near future when we will be in a different environment. The vaccines on the way seem very promising. Meanwhile, stand firm, knowing that the God of all our Advent hopes is faithful and by God's tender mercy, the Dayspring will break upon us from on high. [Luke 1:78]

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail on the 'L'.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis