



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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June 3, 2020

### **Moving to Stage 2 for In-Person Worship Services**

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

I give thanks to God for all the hard work being done by Healthy Church Teams across our Conference as we continue the return to in-person worship. Drive-in services and in-person worship by Pioneer Churches gives us confidence that we can be creative even as we strongly emphasize safety in this COVID-19 environment. With that in mind, it is time for us to start implementing Stage 2 of our Plan to Return to In-Person Worship and I have new information to share.

All churches with an appropriate plan that has been approved by their District Superintendent can proceed to this stage of in-person worship starting June 21, 2020. The Cabinet reviewed the pros and cons of moving to Stage 2 with me today and I approved the move to Stage 2. The Handbook for Local Churches has been revised as of June 3, 2020 with the requirements for Stage 2. It can be found at: <https://vaumc.org/return/> . No church should feel obligated to return to in-person worship at this time. If your local clergy is not ready to move to Stage 2, please continue to worship in the way that is in the best interests of the congregation.

Also, there is a new document on communion for Drive-In, Pioneer Churches that are hosting in-person worship now, and all churches moving to Stage 2. The requirements for communion are contained in the Handbook for Local Churches and on the Conference website at [http://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Holycommunion\\_return.pdf](http://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Holycommunion_return.pdf) .

Drive-In services can continue in Stage 2. A brief summary of the requirements for Drive-In services is in Appendix 1 below. A brief summary of the requirements for churches in Stage 2 is in Appendix 2. The full requirements for each type of service are contained in the Handbook. Many churches will continue their Livestream worship services every Sunday.

For those attending in-person worship, we also have developed a fillable Health Acknowledgment Form that anyone can complete online: <https://www.evc.vaumc.org/home/>. After it is completed, the form goes directly to your local clergy. If you need to complete the form manually, you can download it and print it. If you do not have a computer, contact your local clergy and he/she will walk you through the process. A Spanish language form is also available at [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return).

Here are the highlights of In-Person Worship in Stage 2:

- Beginning on June 21, 2020, all churches can return to in-person worship if they comply with physical distancing requirements. This includes, but is not limited to, having proper physical distancing in the sanctuary, chapel, and the fellowship hall. This means that the pew/chair in

front of each person is empty and the pew/chair behind each person is empty so there is at least six feet between all people;

- Besides the distancing requirements, all other in-person worship requirements must be met and practiced by the local church;
- Children seven years of age and above will be allowed to attend;
- Weddings and funerals can take place, but they must comply with the in-person worship requirements in the bullet points above; and
- A brief summary of the requirements for in-person worship in Stage 2 are in Appendix 2.

I will continue to monitor the COVID-19 statistics from the Virginia Department of Health and I will continue to review any data from our various churches as we track the health of our members and guests that have attended Drive-In and Pioneer Churches. I want us to enter Stage 2 safely and if there is a reason to move back to Stage 1 or temporarily end in-person worship, I will not hesitate to do what is necessary to keep us safe.

I encourage all churches that wish to do so to start planning to move into Stage 2. This will require working with your District Superintendent closely. Our District Superintendents have been involved in planning and implementing a variety of worship options and they are a wonderful and quite helpful resource.

Many are ready for Stage 2 and some are not. The most faithful decision for your congregation may be to wait until the pandemic further subsides and we enter Stage 3. In consultation with your Healthy Church Team, your local clergy and District Superintendent must discern together what is in the best interest of your local church. I will be praying for everyone in the Conference and I hope you will pray for me.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Enclosures

## APPENDIX 1

### QUICK SUMMARY OF THE DRIVE-IN WORSHIP SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

- Those that want to attend should register with the church in advance at least four days before the service so there can be adequate planning.
- On the day of the service, if you are sick from anything, please stay home
- Before leaving your home to attend the service, each attendee must:
  - Take his/her temperature. It must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit to attend worship
  - Be prepared to be without access to the church's restrooms
  - Bring face coverings in case of an emergency and you need to leave your vehicle
- When you arrive at church, do not leave your vehicle to socialize with anyone
- Singing is encouraged in vehicles and a soloist is allowed on stage with proper social distancing from the pastor and others on the stage
- Digital bulletin
- Digital words for worship elements
- No childcare during the worship service
- No nursery or children's time
- No Sunday School
- No coffee or fellowship time
- No restrooms will be open for members and guests
- No handshakes or hugging
- Offering is drop off only or collected with baskets on poles to remain 6 feet away from the vehicle
- Communion (pre-packaged or elements brought from home)— The communion requirements have been released and are on the website.

## APPENDIX 2

### QUICK SUMMARY OF THE IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

- Those that want to attend should register with the church in advance at least four days before the service so there can be adequate planning
- Complete the brief Health Acknowledgement Form on the website or download it, complete it, and send it in by email to the local clergy. If you do not have email, call the church and arrange to complete the form
- On the day of the service, if you are sick from anything, please stay home
- Before you leave your home to attend the service, each attendee must:
  - Take his/her temperature. It must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit to attend worship
  - Bring your face covering and hand sanitizer
  - Be prepared to answer follow up questions about your health, if any
- Face coverings required from the time you leave your vehicle until you return to your vehicle to go home
- Strict physical distancing – six feet or more at all times
- Hymnals, Bibles, and all worship materials will be removed
- No choirs but music is encouraged
- No singing - including Congregation but humming or speaking the words is fine
- Digital bulletin
- Digital words for worship elements
- No children under 12 in Stage 1 (Pioneer) and no children under seven in Stage 2
- No childcare during the worship service in Stage 1 (Pioneer), limited childcare in Stage 2 during the worship service
- No nursery or children's time in Stage 1 (Pioneer) but there may be nursery in Stage 2 if the local church can provide it safely
- No Sunday School in Stages 1 and 2
- No coffee or fellowship time in Stages 1 and 2
- Limited restroom usage for churches in Stages 1 and 2
- No handshakes or hugging in Stages 1 and 2
- Drop-off only (offering) in Stages 1 and 2
- Communion (pre-packaged) in Stages 1 and 2—The communion requirements have been released and are on the website.