



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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### **The Joy of In-Person Worship**

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

I have written to you often about the steps and procedures by which churches can return to in-person worship and the need for careful planning in this regard. And I will continue to do so, based on developments regarding COVID-19 in Virginia.

Today, I want to celebrate. Yes, celebrate!

On Sunday, July 19, 371 churches in the Virginia Conference held in-person worship services, continuing a steady rise over the past few weeks. Churches have also been innovative and implemented ways to worship God through online and telephonic services.

As we implement and adjust the “mechanics” of worship, we must never lose sight of the importance of worship. The work that our pastors do in performing services, and the needs that our 314,000 members have, are matters of the soul. Worship is about connecting sisters and brothers in Christ with our loving Creator, which also helps to provide the strength and peace to deal with life’s most pressing matters, including COVID-19.

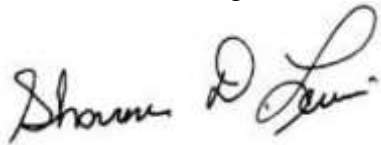
Yes, I understand that in-person worship is not appropriate for all churches at this time, especially those where a pastor has a health issue or concern. And certainly, anyone who is sick or has any related health issues or concerns should continue to worship online or on the telephone. I also realize there are other health, safety, and logistical issues that impact some of our churches and the ability to return to in-person worship now.

Amid these challenges, let us reach out to pastors and church members to learn and share the best worship approaches and to encourage one another. Let us rise to the occasion and energetically and enthusiastically worship our all-loving, all-powerful God.

I have been inspired by how so many churches in Virginia, through a love of Christ and determination to worship, have held in-person worship services and continued to perform our sacraments. In the attached photos are two examples from this past Sunday with the Rev. John F. Rowe Jr. presiding at Linden UMC, Winchester District, and a baptism at Grace UMC in Manassas.

Scripture tells us, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:9-10 NIV). Let us remember these words, and continue to work with and encourage one another, as we worship God and bring people to worship.

Peace and Blessings,



Bishop Sharma D. Lewis



*Grace UMC Baptism*



*The Rev. John F. Rowe Jr. leads worship at Linden UMC.*