



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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### **Update on In-Person Worship Services**

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

Our Conference has begun the return to in-person worship with Drive-In and Pioneer Church services held on Sunday, May 24 and Sunday, May 31. These have gone quite well throughout the Commonwealth. We will continue to build upon this on Sunday, June 7 and in the weeks ahead.

I thank all of you for your continued commitment to serve Christ and to leading your congregations with joy, peace, and ingenuity during this challenging time. I especially thank the dozens of clergy, church staff, laity, and volunteers who held Drive-In services and services in sanctuaries that followed the Pioneer Church worship format.

On May 24, I had the pleasure of attending a Pioneer Church Worship service at Providence UMC in New Kent, which is east of Richmond. This past Sunday, I attended a Drive-In service at Ocran UMC in Sutherland, outside of Petersburg.

Yes, with the safety precautions in place, it was different and at times a little awkward, such as sitting six feet away and having the inconvenience of wearing a face covering. However, taking these precautions quickly melted away because of the joy I felt being at the House of the Lord with fellow believers!

As much as we all desire to “get back to normal” concerning in-person worship, we must approach this carefully, diligently and above all with love for those in our communities, especially the elderly and those with underlying health conditions who are especially susceptible to COVID-19.

Safety matters most. In fact, it cannot be understated that this is an issue of life and death. As such, we have a duty to our members and guests to follow a regimented process that protects everyone from contracting COVID-19. We cannot guarantee anyone’s safety but we know that being casual in how we return to in-person worship is not the way we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is well documented that without proper precautions, churches can be one of the most dangerous places for contracting COVID-19.

Please offer your support and prayers to these churches that are helping us to innovate. If you would like to attend a drive-in service, please call ahead to the church that is offering it at least four days in advance to register your attendance and receive any special instructions. Pray for your own Healthy Church Team as they prepare for the return to in-person worship and as they discern whether to offer your church to be a Pioneer Church.

Learn more about the core requirements for becoming a Pioneer Church or holding a Drive-In service at your church in the attached appendices. In addition, the Local Church Handbook has a wealth of information for any contingencies that may arise or questions you may have about how the Conference is phasing in the return of in-person worship. It can be found at: <https://vaumc.org/return/>.

Please keep in mind that we are all part of the Body of Christ and we have a duty to protect ourselves, our families, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must be measured in how we return to in-person worship. We are to love God and our neighbors and transform the world. We will do both by being careful and safe. The attached sheets and the Handbook are the framework for us to get this right.

I am so proud of how our Conference has remained positive in the face of so much negativity and adversity in our world. Our faith in Jesus Christ provides the only light we need at the end of the tunnel. Our denomination will be stronger because of our connective nature as United Methodists. Pray for me, as I pray for you.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Peace and Blessings,  
Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Enclosures

## APPENDIX 1

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

- Those that want to attend must 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)—The communion requirements will be released during the week of June 1 since we have communion on June 7

## APPENDIX 2

### **QUICK SUMMARY OF THE IN-PERSON PIONEER CHURCH WORSHIP SERVICE REQUIREMENTS**

- Those that want to attend must 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 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 - 6 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 and no children under 7 in Stage 2
- No childcare during the worship service in Stage 1, limited childcare in Stage 2 during the worship service
- No nursery or children's time in Stages 1 and 2
- No Sunday School in Stages 1 and 2
- No coffee or fellowship time in Stages 1 and 2
- Limited restroom usage for Pioneer 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 will be released during the week of June 1 since we have communion on June 7