

Technical Assistance Manual (T.A.M.) Stage 3
Moving Forward in Pandemic Ministry 5/28/2021

How do we plan worship and ministry in a time of pandemic? The Virginia Annual Conference has developed a number of resources through the course of the COVID-19 crisis. The primary resource for worship during this period was the [Technical Assistance Manual \(TAM\)](#) which continues to be a reference tool for congregations. Local churches have worked diligently during this season to continue “being the church” while implementing the protocol outlined in the TAM.

The original TAM and its subsequent updates came to emphasize six mitigation factors that have proven successful in limiting the risk of virus spread: **hygiene, physical distancing, masks, screening, limiting exposure, and ventilation**. Even though we know that the pandemic is not over, the availability and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines greatly reduces the risk of virus spread throughout our communities. Pandemic restrictions continue to be relaxed nationwide and we give thanks for these hopeful signs. However, we all want to do our part in helping to contain the spread of the virus and to practice responsible mitigation measures in our churches by following the best guidance available to us:

[Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People](#)

[ATTENTION: This Order is not effective until midnight on May 28, 2021. NUMBER SEVENTY-NINE \(2021\) AND ORDER OF PUBLIC HEALTH EME.](#)

On May 15, our Bishop, Cabinet and Conference Post-COVID Re-entry Group (PRG) issued a response to Governor Northam’s easing of COVID-19 restrictions that took effect at midnight on that same day. ([Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church Response to Updated Governor's Order](#)). While the Conference encourages churches to use discernment, continued vigilance and a cautious process in easing any mitigation measures currently in place, churches were given the opportunity to take immediate steps, as guided by their Healthy Church Team (HCT) and with the pastor’s approval. Those steps are:

1. Fully vaccinated leaders may preach without a mask ([click here](#))
2. Fully vaccinated persons may be unmasked in indoor and outdoor settings
3. Fully vaccinated persons may sing without a mask in indoor and outdoor settings
4. Eating outdoors may occur with individually packed meals

Churches are encouraged to activate their local PRGs as soon as possible, and to begin using the attached Mitigation Assistance Plan (M.A.P.) as a guide in developing their own mitigation plans that they wish to implement **after May 28**. Information on forming and working with your PRG team, including Frequently Asked Questions, is available here: <https://vaumc.org/prg/> Any easing of local church mitigation measures or new ministry plans should include basic information about appropriate signage, how new practices will be communicated to the congregation so participants can make informed decisions, and when these plans will be implemented by the local church.

By definition, a map helps us chart our course and gives us direction for finding our way toward our destination. The M.A.P. provides flexibility to each local setting, while continuing to emphasize the importance of common sense mitigation. The M.A.P. is not intended to provide a detailed protocol for all the various scenarios or activities that take place in the local church. Local church PRGs now have the freedom to access and interpret the current guidance from the

CDC and State of Virginia for themselves, and determine how and when to implement changes to current mitigation plans, depending on the local context. Church teams that are exploring or have already implemented a relaxation of current mitigation measures will want to reference the current PCR positivity rates available by locality from the Virginia Department of Health ([COVID-19 in Virginia: PCR Test Positivity Rates – Coronavirus](#)) and the vaccination statistics in your area: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-summary/>

Churches that are continuing to use the same TAM plans previously developed and approved by your District Superintendent do not need to re-submit those plans, only the changes that they are implementing to those plans. After **May 28**, the M.A.P. should be used by local church PRGs to work through changes to your church's overall mitigation strategy, and to establish a mitigation strategy for new ministries, or those ministries that have not yet been relaunched in your church.

After plans are approved by your Church Leadership Team/Church Council, please submit your plans to your District Superintendent for review at least two weeks prior to the date of implementation.

The M.A.P. offers guidance for each mitigation factor for churches to consider when developing your own plans. Guidance continues to evolve, so it will be important for churches to stay well-informed. We also understand that the current guidance makes a clear distinction between fully vaccinated and unvaccinated persons with regard to mask wearing, social distancing and the overall safety of participating in various activities around other people. In the church setting, and especially in corporate worship, we encourage the full participation of all persons, including the unvaccinated. Therefore, we encourage observance of practices that will best protect the unvaccinated as we make every effort to “love our neighbor” and “do no harm.” The attached “B.R.A.I.N.” decision-making model is offered to local PRGs to assist you in making these important and challenging decisions for your church moving forward. Gathering input from the congregation may also be helpful to the PRG in their decision-making process.

If at any time, the Commonwealth begins to experience a resurgence of COVID-19 or its variants, the Bishop and Cabinet retain the discretion to reinstate previously employed mitigation measures. For the latest news and updates from the Conference, please visit [Post-COVID Re-entry Group \(PRG\)](#).

M.A.P. (Mitigation Assistance Plan) 5/28/2021

After plans are approved by your Church Leadership Team/Church Council, please submit your plans to your District Superintendent for review at least two weeks prior to the date of implementation.

Name of Church: _____
Submission Date: _____
Implementation Date: _____

In most cases, the church’s overall mitigation practices will apply to all activities held on church property, or sponsored by the church. Please share your mitigation plans below and provide additional details for any activities that may deviate from these plans, or require additional information.

The mitigation plans listed below apply to the following gatherings/ministries/activities:

1. HYGIENE Minimum standards: Encourage and provide for frequent hand hygiene (hand washing, sanitizer and helpful signage); continue to sanitize high-touch areas, especially with consecutive worship services/activities in the same space. (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>).

We will provide for this by:

2. PHYSICAL DISTANCING Minimum standards: Even though physical distancing requirements have been relaxed, distancing may still be appropriate, especially if indoors, unmasked, in a crowded public space, or in congregant settings where the vaccination status of others may be unknown;

We will provide for this by:

3. MASKS Minimum standards: Masks are no longer required for fully vaccinated persons indoors or outdoors. Masks are still appropriate when physical distancing cannot be maintained or in congregant settings where persons from multiple households are gathered. Congregations that are considering unmasking indoors may want to consider those in their church family who are not yet vaccinated, including youth and children, and guests or others in attendance whose vaccination status may be unknown.

We will provide for this by:

4. SCREENING Minimum standards: Stay home when sick; self-check in at the door with a health acknowledgement poster. This link provides a [download of a Health Acknowledgment poster](#) that can be edited for your use.

We will provide for this by:

5. LIMIT EXPOSURE Minimum standards:

Churches should try to gather outdoors whenever possible. When gathering indoors consider:

- a. the total amount of time where groups are gathered indoors in any one gathering space;
- b. the number of people gathered in one space. It is preferable to use larger spaces over smaller ones for all indoor gatherings.

We will provide for this by:

6. VENTILATION Minimum standards: Maximize airflow and turnover of air in the occupied space: 6 exchanges per hour is recommended; prioritize outdoor activities whenever possible

<https://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Ventilationrecommendations.pdf>

We will provide for this by:

Please list below any details for specific gatherings/ministries/activities that require additional information or are not included in the above:

Please submit your Mitigation Assistance Plan for District Superintendent’s review at least two weeks prior to implementation. Contact your District office for more information on how to submit the plan.

Think it through using B.R.A.I.N.*
A Suggested Decision-Making Model for Local Church Teams
**Developed as a collaborative work by various groups, including Patient Voices Network*

We offer the following model as a tool for local church PRGs. It suggests a possible group process that may be helpful to you when applying current mitigation guidance in your local setting and in making important decisions in your church moving forward.

**POST-COVID
RE-ENTRY
GROUP**

**THINK IT THROUGH
USING B.R.A.I.N**
Thought process tool in making critical decisions

B **BENEFITS**
What are the benefits of this decision?
How might this positively impact the church and guests?

R **RISKS**
What are the risks of this decision? How might this negatively impact the church and community?

A **ALTERNATIVES**
What are the alternatives to this decision?
Are there any other options?

I **INTUITION**
What are our hearts telling us? In what direction is the Holy Spirit leading us in this decision?

N **NEED MORE TIME/ NOTHING**
Do we need more time to think this through?
What happens if we do nothing?

*Developed as a collaborated work by groups, including Patient Voices Network

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
WWW.VAUMC.ORG/PRG