

News Release

New Post-COVID Re-entry Group Introduced at Monday Webinar

for release: Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis announced a shift in the way the Annual Conference will address the current pandemic at a progress report webinar held on April 26. A new Post-COVID Re-entry Group (PRG) convened by the Rev. Seungsoo 'RJ' Jun will take over the duties of the existing COVID work groups (Back to In-Person Worship and Mission & Ministry) as of May 1, 2021.

The new PRG will incorporate members of the current workgroups and will begin the proactive work of resourcing churches for ministry in the coming post-pandemic environment. The group will also continue the focus on assisting churches to engage in safe practices as they conduct in-person worship and ministry.

"The pandemic is not over and there is still a need for vigilance," said the Rev. Alex Joyner, chair of the existing worship workgroup. "But churches and leaders are ready to look ahead with hope to what comes next. This new group expects that God will do a great new thing among us and will help us be open to the possibilities of this moment."

Upcoming Transition

There is big news for local churches in the shift as well. Healthy Church Teams (HCTs) have done extensive work through the pandemic in developing plans for ministry based on the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM) and other resources provided by the workgroups. During the month of June, churches will be invited to celebrate the work of the HCTs and bring them to a close while transitioning to local church Post-COVID Re-entry Groups.

Major decision-making on COVID-mitigation methods will revert to local churches as of July 1, with district superintendents providing a review of plans. A new, greatly-reduced document will succeed the current TAM to guide local churches as they develop their plans.

"We have come a long way in this journey," Bishop Lewis said, "and one of the blessings we have noted is that we have not had any major breakouts reported in our churches. I ask local churches to continue their good work as they now take on an expanded role." The bishop noted that the conference may revert to previous standards if circumstances change (such as a new surge or variant spread).

Changes to Indoor Singing Guidelines

Also announced at the webinar was a change in indoor singing guidelines. [Studies on the effectiveness of vaccines](#) now indicate that those who have received mRNA vaccinations and are two weeks beyond their final dose seem to be at low risk for infection and for transmission. While still waiting to hear how variants of the COVID-19 virus may affect this picture, the

guidelines are being adjusted to allow for limited singing indoors under the same conditions as outdoors with those who are fully vaccinated being the singers for now.

Under these new guidelines, fully vaccinated persons may sing indoors for five minutes total (about two hymns) if they are wearing well-fitting masks covering their nose and mouth while distanced six feet or more. Singers are encouraged to sing *sotto voce* (i.e. in a quiet voice). Participants should be informed in advance that there will be singing so that they may choose their tolerance level. Churches are advised not to ask for proof of vaccination and to operate with an honor system.

Relaunch Webinars

In preparation for this transition, the new conference PRG team will host a series of four webinars to assist the local church PRG teams. Every Thursday evening, starting on May 13, the conference will host a Zoom webinar for local churches. Each webinar will offer updates on health mitigation guidelines, as local churches establish their PRG groups. The webinars will also feature special guests, who will offer foundational information for “ReLaunch” into the Post-COVID era.

Relaunch Webinar Schedule

Webinar #1 - May 13, 2021, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Title: Nuts and Bolts of PRG/Dream a Relaunch Day

Special Guests: Paul Nickerson & Jim Griffith, Professional Coaches

Webinar #2 - May 20, 2021, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Title: Ultimate Relaunch Playbook - Relaunch rather than reopening doors

Special Guest: Kay Kotan, Greatest Expedition

Webinar #3 - May 27, 2021, 6:30 - 9:00 pm

Title: Both/And Hybrid Worship

Guest Speaker: Jason Moore, Midnight Oil Production

Webinar #4 - June 3, 2021, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Title: Relaunch Ministries

Special Guests: Nickie Moreno Howard & Dwayne Stinson, Conference Staff

Membership of New Group

The Rev. RJ Jun is the associate director of Serving Ministries for the Virginia Conference. He will be joined on the new PRG by the following members:

The Rev. Beth Anderson, pastor of Courthouse Community UMC, Virginia Beach (ER)

Ms. Marie Coons, layperson, Richmond District

The Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of High St UMC, Franklin (JR)

Mrs. Heather Gomez, layperson, Harrisonburg District

The Rev. Nancy Coleman Johnson, Emmanuel UMC, Amherst (L)

Mr. Andrew Kissel, Environmental/Sanitary Engineer, Southeastern Jurisdiction United Methodist Men President

The Rev. Janet Knott, Glovier Memorial UMC (S)

The Rev. Brenda Lee Laws, deacon, Greenbackville Charge (ES)

Dr. Karen McElfish, M.D., pediatrician, Arlington District Lay Leader

Ms. Reba Miller, Woodlawn Faith UMC, R.N & Attorney

Dr. George F. Moxley, M.D., physician and rheumatologist, VCU

The Rev. Leigh Anne Taylor, Revitalization Coordinator (L), President, The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music & Worship Arts

The Rev. Jenelle Watson, associate pastor, Calvary UMC, Stuarts Draft (S)

New Items on the Resource page

Two new items have been added to the resource page on the conference website: [a revised health acknowledgement poster](#) and [an update on ventilation](#). You can also find the latest version of the [Technical Assistance Manual \(TAM\) here](#).