

# **Taking the Next Step**

Stage 2.2 of the Return to In-Person Worship  
and  
Other Gatherings

## **THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MANUAL FOR LOCAL CHURCHES**

**Back to In-Person Worship Work Group  
Virginia Annual Conference**

**June 15, 2020**

updated August 3, 2020  
updated September 10, 2020  
updated October 20, 2020  
updated October 21, 2020  
updated November 9, 2020  
updated November 12, 2020  
updated December 11, 2020  
updated February 24, 2021  
updated March 17, 2021  
updated March 24, 2021  
updated April 26, 2021  
updated April 29, 2021

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## I. **INTRODUCTION: TAKING THE NEXT STEP**

Stage 2 of the Plan to Return to In-Person Worship and Gatherings allows local churches to move into in-person worship. This Technical Assistance Manual (“TAM”) consolidates and clarifies the information from the earlier Handbook for Local Churches, extending it to new circumstances and incorporating the feedback and learnings from churches around the Virginia Conference. Much of what you need to develop a plan for your local church can be found here. As of June 21, 2020, the TAM is the Conference’s operating document.<sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 remains a serious and deadly threat. At this point, our aim is to limit spread of COVID-19. Current science has shown that a single person with mild or no COVID-19 symptoms may lead to a dramatic outbreak, and most outbreaks come from just a few people—about 80% of spread arises from 10% of infected people. Such spread often occurs in settings of prolonged exposure in crowded poorly ventilated indoor settings, and with activities like singing, shouting, or aerobic exercise.

At this time, the protocols are aimed toward reducing spread by these measures:

- Wear masks. We recommend following CDC recommendations, and these include using medical masks (droplet, KN95, KN94, or N95 if available), and especially double masking, a medical mask covered by a cloth mask.
- Avoid crowding--maintain physical distance of six feet or more.
- Adequate ventilation as recommended by the CDC, through opening doors and windows when possible and safe, and improving ventilation through HVAC settings.<sup>2</sup>
- Use outdoor settings more than indoor settings, and large rooms more than small.
- Stay at home when possible.
- Limit duration of exposure. Even five minutes in an indoor poorly ventilated setting may result in spread.
- Limit singing, shouting, or loud talking. (See guidance in Attachment G)

Omitting two or more measures--like taking off a mask for a prolonged period indoors--means a much higher risk of spreading infection. Therefore, to reduce spread, we aim to use all measures if possible, and omit no more than one measure in any situation.

Since its inception at the direction of Bishop Sharma D. Lewis, the Back to In-Person Worship Work Group of the Virginia Conference has worked to provide a comprehensive plan with a priority on loving our neighbors by first doing no harm. Using the best information and wisdom available from medical, church, governmental, and legal sources, the Work Group has come to emphasize six practices that have proven successful in limiting the risk of virus spread: hygiene, physical distancing, masks, screening, limiting exposure time, and ventilation.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Lewis asked the Work Group to develop this TAM as a shorter tem-

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<sup>1</sup>The Handbook for Local Churches contains the rationale for the three stages the Conference is following to return to in-person worship. The entire rationale will not be repeated in the TAM but it applies and is incorporated herein. The Handbook for Local Churches with all the attachments is on the Conference website for anyone to review the complete work of the Back to In-Person Work Group from May 12, 2020 – June 20, 2020. The Handbook for Local Churches contains FAQs and an Attachment showing all of the edits from May 12, 2020 – June 20, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/ventilation.html>

<sup>3</sup>Four of these areas are helpfully outlined in an article by Dr. Atul Gawande, “Amid the Coronavirus Crisis: A Regimen for Reentry,” *The New Yorker*, 13 May 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/science/medical-dispatch/amid-the-coronavirus-crisis-a-regimen-for-reentry>.

plate for the requirements each local church will need to follow to resume in-person worship<sup>4</sup> during Stage 2 and to have other in-person gatherings.

Stage 3 is envisioned as a time when churches can move to a ‘new normal,’ when the major pandemic concerns are alleviated. In the interim, as we learn more about the virus and as more persons are vaccinated, we will see periodic adjustments to TAM restrictions. As of February 24, 2021 we are in Stage 2.2.

The return to in-person worship and other gatherings must be done safely. In order to worship or gather in Stage 2, each local church will need the approval of their specific plan by their District Superintendent. **The move to Stage 2 is not automatic by any means.** We recognize that regional, county, or local outbreaks may require some or all of our churches to delay moving to a specific stage and any outbreaks or other factors may require the return to more severe restrictions for in-person worship. Based on the severity of the outbreak in a particular district or a part of a district, District Superintendents may use their discretion in delaying implementation of any stage until conditions allow. Ultimately, the Bishop has total discretion related to any issue associated with in-person worship and other in-person gatherings during this pandemic.

## **II. STAGE 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Because we are putting a priority on the safety of every person present, the Conference is requiring a number of rules and protocols to be followed. These are not recommendations and they are not optional. The Bishop is ordering that the rules and protocols be implemented consistently no matter the size of the church. For instance, if a church does not follow the rules and requirements, in-person worship and other gatherings will be stopped at that location. If any individual refuses to follow the rules and requirements, the individual will be asked to leave the in-person worship service, the in-person gathering, or the drive-in service. If the non-complying individual refuses to leave the building or refuses to get back in his/her vehicle at a drive-in service, the service or gathering will immediately end and those in attendance must leave the church property.

These measures may seem severe. We trust that everyone who attends will understand the importance of the measures we are taking, but we realize that some people may oppose the requirements by showing opposition and refusing to comply. Because the safety of everyone is involved, this will not be tolerated. We know that COVID-19 is highly contagious by inhaling respiratory droplets from others. This happens when people do not wear masks and when they do not stay 6 feet apart. **SOCIAL DISTANCING (STAYING 6 FEET OR MORE AWAY FROM OTHERS) AND MASKS FOR IN-PERSON WORSHIP AND IN-PERSON GATHERINGS WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE.** We are a connectional people and we need to follow these requirements as a way of loving our neighbors at this time. The health and safety of our members, guests, employees, and our general community demands that we strictly adhere to all of these requirements.

The Virginia Conference moved into Stage 2 on June 21, 2020. Churches that are not ready to return to in-person worship in Stage 2 should continue to provide Drive-In, Livestream, and conference call worship, which were allowed in Stage 1. Churches that are

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<sup>4</sup> A worship service includes anytime clergy is presiding such as on Sunday morning, a wedding, a funeral, or a baptism.

not ready to return to in-person worship in Stage 2 may decide to develop and implement a plan to host in-person gatherings<sup>5</sup> inside the church building. Every church that is moving into Stage 2 must go through the preparation stage with the Healthy Church Team to develop a detailed plan.

### **III. THE STAGE 2 PREPARATION STAGE**

**Planning Requirements:** Development of Healthy Church Team - Consideration of willingness/ability to return to in-person gatherings as part of Stage 2.

**Worship Options:** Drive-In Services and In-Person Worship Services

All churches will create a **Healthy Church Team** (“HCT”) to prepare for the time when they are able to offer in-person worship. The HCT will provide advice and counsel to the lead Clergy and the Chairs of Trustees, Church Council, and S/PPRC. The HCT should include: Senior Clergy, Lead Laity member, a member of the Board of Trustees, a member of Church Council, a medical professional (if available in the membership), an attorney (if available in the membership), a member from the usher/greeter team, and any outside consultants should be sought. The HCT will coordinate with the clergy, staff, volunteers, and the District Superintendent on a number of issues associated with creating a plan for in-person worship that complies with the requirements in this document.

Because the health and safety of our churches is the utmost priority, the selection of healthy and non-vulnerable volunteers for worship and gatherings is crucial. It is very important that all prospective volunteers self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, sore throat, headache, muscle pain, gastrointestinal issues, chills, and new loss of taste and/or smell) and complete a Health Acknowledgement Form or answer health questions at the door. Anyone who presents with these symptoms or feels sick will not be selected to volunteer. Vulnerable individuals (persons with pre-existing medical conditions) will not be selected as volunteers due to the increased risk of serving as a volunteer.

Church staff may be returning to work on or before June 15, 2020 unless there are specific issues that apply to secular staff under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act<sup>6</sup> (“FFCRA”), the Americans with Disabilities Act<sup>7</sup> (“ADA”) (if applicable), or the Virginians with Disabilities Act<sup>8</sup> (“VDA”) (if applicable).

### **IV. STAGE 2: TRANSITION**

**Timeline:** **Began June 21, 2020.** In this stage, all churches with a DS-approved plan may return to in-person gatherings as long as they follow the requirements in Attachments A, B and D. No local church shall go over the 50% total occupancy. This decision to move to Stage

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<sup>5</sup>The HCT will also be involved in gatherings. See Attachment E.

<sup>6</sup>The FFCRA applies to secular employees but not ministerial employees. The FFCRA deals with leave issues because of COVID-19 reasons.

<sup>7</sup>The ADA applies to secular employees that work for churches with 15 or more employees.

<sup>8</sup> The VDA applies to secular employees that work for churches with between 5-14 employees.

2 is in the sole discretion of the Bishop based on the results in Stage 1 and other factors associated with the ability of the District Superintendents to supervise the local churches in their Districts and with public safety concerns.

**Worship Options:** Drive-In Worship, Online/Conference Call Worship, and in-person worship under these requirements and rules.

In Stage 2, churches may have in-person worship services while maintaining physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) at all times. Continued health and safety protocols, including the use of masks at all in-person worship services (indoor or outdoor), and proper sanitation measures, will be strictly adhered to and enforced. In no event should any local church hold an indoor service in any location that exceeds 50% capacity of the sanctuary, chapel, or fellowship hall. It is impossible for any church in the Conference to meet or exceed the 50% capacity requirement because of the physical social distancing required in the sanctuary, chapel, or fellowship hall. If the local church is holding an outdoor service, the outdoor service must adhere to the same social distancing requirements as if the service was conducted in the building. The worship capacity for an outdoor service must not exceed 250 persons.

In Stage 2, the following is required:

- **Required**—Healthy Church Teams, congregations, and those part of an in-person worship must follow the directives in this TAM.
- **Required**—All churches need to submit their plans to return to in-person worship and gatherings to their District Superintendent ten (10) days in advance of their first in-person worship service.
- Any child that can comply with the requirements of the TAM may attend in-person services in this stage.
- **Required**—**If a person is not able to wear a mask, the person cannot attend an in-person service in this stage or any stage where a mask is required. If a person has breathing difficulties and cannot wear a mask, the person cannot attend an in-person service or any stage where a mask is required.**
- **Required**—Individuals must do a pre-attendance temperature check before arriving (temperature must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit—means no fever). If you have a fever or you are sick without a fever, stay home.
- **Required**—With the exception of Drive-In services only, everyone must wear a mask as directed when attending a service on church property. Persons should bring their own masks as the church will not provide masks as a matter of course. Masks need to be two layers thick. The nose and mouth must be covered at all times. As a general rule, the church will not be required to provide hand sanitizer because churches may not be able to obtain enough for use for members and guests. If anyone wants or needs hand sanitizer, the person must bring it. The church will not be supplying other personal protective equipment (“PPE”) for anyone.<sup>9</sup> **Persons who have been fully vaccinated may remove their masks when they have reached their properly distanced seating areas in an outdoor service only. Masks are required for all persons during congregational**

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<sup>9</sup> See CDC “Guidance for Wearing Masks,” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>.

singing.

- **Required**—Every person should review their own health before attending an in-person worship service or gathering. One of the following two methods of health acknowledgement must be used for every in-person gathering, with the exception of drive-in worship.
  - 1) Health Forms on line. We have developed a fillable Health Acknowledgement Form that anyone can complete online on the Conference website at <https://www.evc.vaumc.org/home/> After it is completed, the form goes directly to your local clergy. If you need to complete the Health Acknowledgement Form manually, you can download it and print it and send it to the church. You can download the form from the Conference website at <https://vaumc.org/return>. If you are not able to complete the form online, call your local church clergy and complete the form over the telephone. A verbal acknowledgement will be noted by the clergy for those that can only complete this over the telephone.
  - 2) Entryway Health Acknowledgement. An entryway version of the Health Acknowledgement Form can be found at [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return). Churches may print the form in poster-size and post it at the entryways used for each in-person gathering. Persons entering must read the form, acknowledge that they can affirm ‘yes’ to all of the statements on it to a volunteer posted at the door, and provide their name and contact information, which the volunteer will record and the church will keep. HCTs will need to develop a plan for keeping persons socially distanced during this entry process. Persons who cannot affirm ‘yes’ to all the statements on the form will not be able to enter.
- **Required**—No clergy, member, guest, or volunteer will be allowed to attend an in-person service in Stage 2 if:
  - He/she has two or more symptoms of COVID-19 in the last 14 days; or
  - He/she came in contact with anyone else with COVID-19 symptoms in the last 14 days; or
  - He/she has symptoms of COVID-19 and he/she is waiting for the results of a test or is waiting for the symptoms to subside to the point of being recovered; or
  - He/she tested positive for COVID-19 and is still suffering from COVID-19.

If any member or guest attending a service in Stage 2 has tested positive in the past for COVID-19, has fully recovered, is symptom-free, and has observed the required 10 day period of self-isolation, they can attend one of the in-person services. Such persons should follow the current advice of their health care provider, and should contact their local clergy to discuss attendance at an in-person worship service when submitting the Health Acknowledgement Form.

Fully vaccinated healthcare workers and other frontline personnel who may be exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the course of their work may attend an in-person service if they are otherwise symptom-free. Fully vaccinated means that 14 days have passed since the final dose of a vaccine is administered.

The Health Acknowledgement Form and other health-related information

will be reviewed by the local clergy only at the local church level and it will be secured in a confidential folder in a locked file cabinet or other secure location. The Health Acknowledgement Form and other health-related information about a staff member, church member, guest, or vendor will also be available for review by the District Superintendent, the Cabinet, the Office of the Bishop, or the Chancellor. Also, the local church, District Superintendent, the Cabinet, the Office of the Bishop, or the Chancellor will cooperate with any federal, state, or local health agency that request the Health Acknowledgement Form or other health-related information for legitimate purposes, including, but not limited to, COVID-19 contact tracing by the Department of Health.

- **Required**—Have a vehicle traffic flow and building traffic flow team. Vehicles should be parked in a way to avoid contact with people leaving or getting into the vehicle to minimize the chance of violating the social distancing space with other people leaving or getting into their vehicles. This can be done by providing instructions or developing a parking plan. Also, determine which door(s) will be used to come into the church.
- **Required**—Identify service logistics. Greeting outside the building (proper physical social distancing—stay 6 feet or more away from others) to check that each person entering is wearing a mask. Churches are not providing masks as a matter of course. If the person does not have a mask, they do not enter any service, indoor or outdoor. Have the greeter by the door lock the door if the person approaching the building refuses to wear a mask. Greet each person inside the building (proper physical social distancing—stay 6 feet or more away from others) to ensure the person is wearing the mask; monitor the service to ensure that everyone wears the mask the entire time on church property and until they get back in their vehicle.
- **Required**—Comply with and enforce strict physical social distancing (staying 6 feet or more away from others) protocol at all times. Seating in the building will be 6 feet apart from those that are not immediate household members.
- Families with children in attendance at a worship service in Stage 2 should sit near the exits during the in-person service in case the child removes the mask and will not put it back on. This allows a parent or guardian to remove the child from the service, if necessary. The child and parent/guardian that leave the service cannot come back in the service once they leave over a mask issue. The service should not have to end if a child has issues keeping the mask on his/her face.
- Consider providing electronic materials for worship in advance (*i.e.*, a bulletin, Bible passages, etc.).
- These on-site requirements for any service or event officiated by local UMC clergy apply even when there is an off-site (private property) service or other event.
- Enforcement of rules, requirements, and protocols for everyone. If someone removes his/her mask, they will be asked to put the mask back on. If the person refuses, the service will be stopped, and everyone will leave. The person that violates the “mandatory mask rule” will not be allowed back on church property until he/she agrees to comply with all of the requirements. The same is true for failing to abide by strict physical social distancing (staying 6 feet or more away from others). If someone fails to abide by the physical social distancing requirement,



they will be asked to do so. If the person refuses, the service will be stopped, and everyone will leave. The person that violates the “physical social distancing rule” will not be allowed back on church property until he/she agrees to comply with all of the requirements. The safety of everyone is of utmost importance and we will not allow anyone to endanger the safety of our members, guests, and the community.

Drive-In and/or virtual worship will still be necessary in churches and congregations to accommodate vulnerable populations and others that are not ready to move into Stage 2. The requirements for Drive-In Worship are contained in Attachment C.

The Strict Protocol Requirements in the various attachments will be revised and improved based on the status of Virginia’s capacity limits and other health and safety protocols. No church should feel obligated to open. Online/Conference Call Services should continue for those churches that want to continue these alternatives ways to worship.

## V. **ATTACHMENT A: HEALTHY CHURCH TEAM REQUIREMENTS**

### A. **Strict Protocol Requirements: Generally**

#### • **Individual Safety**

- Those who are sick must stay home.
- Masks required for in-person worship services indoor and outdoor.<sup>10</sup> Worship leaders may use a mask incorporating a clear shield for lip reading purposes as long as the mask fits snugly on the face.<sup>11</sup> Worship leaders should also make sure that they are properly fitted with microphones so that they may be heard.
- Post signage at the entrance that states “No one with fever or symptoms of COVID-19 or known exposure to COVID-19 in the prior 14 days is allowed in.”
- Sanitizer stations may not be available for members and guests. Individuals need to bring their own hand sanitizer.
- Strict physical distancing - 6 feet or more at all times.
- Post signage to provide public health reminders of social distancing, options other than in-person worship, and staying home if sick.
- In order to maintain maximum capacity requirements (50%), churches may have multiple services in different parts of the building at the same time, or multiple worship times in the same space staggered throughout the week.
- Hymnals and Bibles, once cleaned, may be placed in pews if they are not shared during services.
- No choirs.
- Limited congregational singing. See guidance in Attachment G.

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<sup>10</sup> See CDC “Guidance for Wearing Masks,” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>.

<sup>11</sup> An example of this kind of mask can be found here: [https://www.etsy.com/listing/822777821/window-face-mask-nose-wire-smile-mask?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=see+through+mask&ref=sc\\_gallery-1-+1&plkey=03e8f9e0f4fa6c9137ee1434ed784f0013ba8532%3A822777821&frs=1+&bes=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/822777821/window-face-mask-nose-wire-smile-mask?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=see+through+mask&ref=sc_gallery-1-+1&plkey=03e8f9e0f4fa6c9137ee1434ed784f0013ba8532%3A822777821&frs=1+&bes=1). You should be sure the mask meets medical requirements.

- Digital bulletins or bulletins sent ahead by mail are encouraged. Paper bulletins may be used.
- Digital words for worship elements are encouraged.
- Children welcome in Stage 2.
- Limited childcare in Stage 2 during the in-person worship services with additional requirements. See Attachment B.
- Sunday School in Stage 2 increases the amount of time persons are in the building. Mitigate risk by limiting exposure time, (for instance, 90 minutes total for worship & Sunday School combined), moving to a different room from the worship space where aerosol particles have not been accumulating, and ensuring good ventilation, adequate distancing, and masks.
- No coffee or fellowship time in Stage 2.
- Restrooms may be used for Drive-In Worship and Outdoor services.
- Limited restroom usage in Stage 2 for in-person worship.
- No handshakes or hugging in Stage 2.
- Drop-off offering or passing of the offering plates in Stage 2. Attendees must maintain 6 feet social distance while passing the plate using arms fully outstretched. Offering receptacles on poles are encouraged. If current alternatives are working, we encourage continuance.
- Communion (pre-packaged). Requirements are in Attachment F.
- Baptisms may occur in Stage 2 as long as all other requirements for in-person worship are observed. We recommend the protocol found in “Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic” produced by the Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments: <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10369/resuming-care-filled-worship-and-sacramental-life-during-a-pandemic>.
- Weddings may occur in Stage 2 as long as physical distancing (6 feet or more) and all other requirements for in-person worship are observed.
- Funerals may occur in Stage 2 as long as physical distancing (6 feet or more) and all other requirements for in-person worship are observed.
- Clean high touch areas.
- Strict physical distancing in Sanctuary seating in Stage 2
- In Stage 2, churches may have in-person worship services while maintaining physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) at all times, masks at prescribed times, and limited duration. In no event should any local church hold an indoor service in any location that exceeds 50% capacity of the sanctuary, chapel, or fellowship hall. The worship capacity for an outdoor service must not exceed 250 persons.
- Continue livestream or other options for most vulnerable.
- The requirements for any service in Stages 1, 2, and 3 apply even when there is an off-site (private property) worship service with UMC clergy.
- Meals can be prepared for off-site consumption as long as churches comply with the requirements in this document and food safety guidelines provided by the Virginia Department of Health [<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in->

[virginia/food-safety-basics/](#)]. Churches are encouraged to contact the local Health Department to become certified. Any plans for meal preparations should be included in Healthy Church Team plans and approved by the District Superintendent.

**B. Strict Protocol Requirements: Specifically**

• **What have we learned?**

- Ask the team to assess the ministry of the church during the shutdown period?
- What did we learn to do differently?
- What blessings did God send to us?
- What gifts did we have that we didn't know we had?
- What are we doing that we want to keep doing?
- What things that we used to do can we stop doing?

• **Assessment of Volunteers and Staff**

- Provide volunteers to clean and prepare the church campus for in-person worship.
- Staff and volunteers will be screened and required to complete a Health Acknowledgement Form or answer other or additional questions about their health to ensure they are not ill.
- Staff and volunteers will also need to comply with all requirements.

• **Cleaning Plan**

- Do a thorough cleaning of the facility prior to initial reopening and prepare the campus so that people can adequately comply with physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) from the time they enter the property until they leave. Develop signage to offer clear directives to attendees on how to behave and uphold protocols.
- Continue normal, routine cleaning once you return to in-person worship.
- Clean handrails, tables and chairs, bathrooms, and the back of pews and other touchable and common surfaces.
- Reduce touchable items in all areas.
- Reduce the number of toys and clean all toys. Remove all stuffed animals.
- Water fountains should remain shut off unless they have undergone flushing and disinfecting protocols AND are used at least 5 days per week.<sup>12</sup>
- Minimize the reasons persons would touch common surfaces (doorknobs, etc.) while in the building – leaving some doors open during services.
- Sanitizer stations may not be in churches for members and guests. Individuals need to bring their own personal hand sanitizer.
- Create and display signage (inside and outside) to offer clear directives to attendees.

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<sup>12</sup> CDC guidance for “reopening after prolonged shutdown update” of 25 Feb 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html> ; and EPA guidance on “Maintaining or Restoring Water Quality in Buildings with Low or No Use” of July 2020, [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/final\\_maintaining\\_building\\_water\\_quality\\_5.6.20-v2.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-05/documents/final_maintaining_building_water_quality_5.6.20-v2.pdf)

- Mark designated entrances and building traffic patterns.
- Mark seating arrangements and provide social-distancing instruction.
- Remind people to practice physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others), hand washing, and not to touch their faces.
- Determine whether to restrict access to certain areas of the church campus.
- Consider keeping the nurseries (unless you have a plan for limited nurseries), gym, classrooms, offices, kitchen, and playgrounds closed.
- **Physical Distancing Plan (6 feet or more) should include the following:**
  - How to maintain distancing at entrances, exits, sanctuary, chapel, fellowship halls, restrooms, narthex, and overflow areas;
  - Monitoring persons to help keep physical distancing;
  - Reduce length of worship services to allow for congregants to come and go safely;
  - Ensure everyone stays 6 feet away from one another;
  - Family members that have been together the entire time are not required to be 6 feet apart;
  - If you are sick, stay home;
  - Everyone will be required to wear a mask the entire time in the in-person service. (See [limited exception for communion in Attachment G](#)). If you cannot wear a mask or you refuse to wear a mask, you cannot attend in-person worship;
  - Develop a seating plan to arrange the seating in a manner that complies with physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) constraints;
  - Develop a plan for coming and going: Ensure proper physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) can be maintained in the entrance and exit, restrooms, and any other common spaces;
  - Develop a parking plan to adhere to physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) requirements even while outside;
  - Require attendees to park with at least the spots on the left and right of their vehicle open (for Drive-In Worship Services only);
  - Mark-off parking spots as necessary; and
  - Vehicles should be parked in a way to avoid contact with people leaving or getting into the vehicle to minimize the chance of violating the social distancing space with other people leaving or getting into their vehicles. This can be done by providing instructions or developing a parking plan.
- **Check with Liability Insurer for implications of your plans**
- **Develop a Plan for Ministry with the most vulnerable**
  - Develop programs/care networks to keep them engaged.
  - Determine if a special service day and time can be used.
- **Continue Streaming Worship, Devotionals, and Bible Study**
- **Communication Plan**

- Send out the communication to your members with the plan for services offered and any rules for attendance.
  - Post the communication on your website along with the rules for attendance. If you don't have a website, post it on whatever social media platform you use.
  - Allow time for congregants to build trust and process the reopening plan.
  - Plan for Multiple Soft Opening Experiences during weekdays.
  - Prepare a walk-through video of what Stage 2 will be like.
  - Develop signage: Directional, washing hands/sanitizer locations, seating.
  - Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time, including posting your bulletin on your website or social media platform and/or emailing your members the bulletin.
- **Development of an Emergency Preparation Plan Considering the Following:**
    - An isolation or holding room for those who are symptomatic;
    - Contact information for medical professionals and local public health authority, 911 address of the church, local emergency departments, in a visible place in the church;
    - Procedure to accommodate for volunteers who are absent; and
    - Communicating the plan.
  - **Communicate Expectations/Requirements to Groups Sharing the Facility**

## **VI. ATTACHMENT B: LIMITED CHILDCARE REQUIREMENTS**

The Healthy Church Team (“HCT”), along with persons involved in Children’s Ministry, will establish and carry out a Limited Childcare Plan (“LCP”). The LCP should be submitted to the District Superintendent as part of each church’s reopening plan. [Additional guidance that may be relevant can be found on the CDC Website: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-child-care/guidance-for-childcare.html.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-child-care/guidance-for-childcare.html)

Children of any age who want to attend worship with their family may do so if they wear a mask and remain with the family at all times. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two should not wear masks,<sup>13</sup> and therefore they are excluded from the mandatory mask requirement.

The LCP must contain, but is not limited to, the following elements:

1. Safe Sanctuaries guidelines must be reviewed, updated and followed.
2. All childcare rooms should be cleaned and sanitized according to Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. Review and implement the following:
  - Consider which toys, books and supplies should be used and which ones could be stored away for the time being. (It is recommended by the CDC to remove stuffed animals and cloth toys but books and puzzles may remain in the room.);

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

- Establish procedures for ongoing cleaning of toys, furnishings and surfaces; and
  - Designate children’s bathrooms if possible.
3. Establish a plan for volunteers/staffing of the children’s spaces. Review and implement the following:
    - All adults in Stage 2 are required to submit a Health Acknowledgement Form or use entryway acknowledgement procedure and wear a mask;
    - Contingencies need to be in place for when a worker is unable to serve, and if more children show up than were expected; and
    - Workers must wash or sanitize hands before handling children. All supplies must be readily available but out of the reach of children.
  4. Define how children will be assigned to rooms (by age, by family, etc.). Every room must allow for enough space to achieve 6-foot social distancing. The reality is that it will be hard to keep children apart but bigger rooms allow children to spread out.
  5. Establish a communication plan for children and parents/caregivers so that they will know what to expect. Review and implement the following:
    - Give your church members/attendees as much information as possible about the LCP. Include not only the time, location, and service type, but list out all rules, requirements, and protocols, including capacity limits, physical social distancing requirements, etc.;
    - Provide a contact person and contact information for members to raise any questions or concerns they may have. Ultimately, the members should be well-informed to build trust and process the plan; and
    - A video would be helpful to make the parents and children aware of the experience they will have for limited childcare.
  6. Establish a registration, check-in and check-out procedure. Review and implement the following:
    - Request preregistration (RSVP) for children participating in limited childcare during worship A church can add whatever information they need for each child attending;
    - Infants and Toddlers may be checked-in and checked-out at the nursery door but parents/caregivers should not enter the room. It is recommended that diaper bags be secured in a space away from the main room;
    - Older children may be checked-in and checked-out in a location away from the childcare space. A worker will escort the child to the proper room. Make sure there is social distancing of 6 foot for adults waiting to check in/out children;
    - Children may not bring items from home, with the exception of diaper supplies; and
    - Food and drink are prohibited at this time.

## **VII. ATTACHMENT C: DRIVE-IN WORSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

### **A. Strict Protocol Requirements: Generally**

- **Individual Safety**
  - Continue Healthy Church Teams.
  - Those who are sick must stay home.

- Strict physical distancing - 6 feet or more at all times.
- No choirs.
- Singing allowed in cars. **See Attachment G for outdoor congregational singing requirements.**
- Up to 4 singers to lead congregational singing are allowed with masks and proper social distancing - at least 6 feet from each other (more is ideal) and 25 feet from the congregation. Persons in household groups may stand closer to each other (but not to congregation). Rehearsals must be under same conditions.
- Digital bulletin or bulletin handed out by greeter.
- No childcare in Stage 2 during Drive-In worship service.
- No nursery in Stage 2.
- No coffee or fellowship time in Stage 2.
- No handshakes or hugging in Stage 2.
- Offering may be drop-off or taken up by ushers passing the offering plate. Attendees must maintain social distance while passing the plate using arms fully outstretched. Offering receptacles on poles are encouraged. If current alternatives are working, we encourage continuance.
- Communion (pre-packaged) in Stage 2. Requirements in Attachment F.
- Participants must not leave vehicles to socialize with anyone.
- Continue livestream and other options for most vulnerable.
- The requirements for any service in Stages 1, 2, and 3 apply even when there is an off-site (private property) worship service with UMC clergy.

## **B. Strict Protocol Requirements: Specifically**

- **Registration**
  - Churches may ask all those that want to attend Drive-In Worship to register with the church in advance.
  - There may need to be extra services added if the parking lot will be too full or if there is only one service, then it may have to be limited in how many can attend.
- **Day of the Service**
  - Before leaving to attend the Drive-In Worship service, each attendee must:
    - Take his or her temperature. It must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in order to attend worship;
    - If you are feeling ill, stay home;
    - Be prepared to be without access to the church's restrooms; and
    - Bring masks in case of an emergency and you need to leave your vehicle.
- **Service Logistics**
  - Determine how you will provide the Drive-In Worship service.
  - It's tempting to think of lots of ways to enhance the service, such as projecting the words on a screen, etc. but keep in mind, the more you do, then

the more volunteers and equipment you require. The risk of exposure goes up when there are more people helping and more surfaces that can be touched by those setting up. Keep it all as simple as possible.

- Will the service be presented from an outdoor stage, and if so, will the stage be in the parking lot or on the edge of the parking lot?
  - If no stage is required, how will you handle audio issues safely?
  - If you are also providing the service via Zoom, internet, or radio, how will this be conducted?
  - Comply with and enforce strict physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) protocol at all times (churchgoers must park apart from other vehicles and remain in their vehicles for the entirety of the service and leave the parking lot without leaving the vehicle).
  - Restrooms may be used by those attending provided they maintain social distance of six feet and wear a mask at all times.
- **Emergency Services**
    - Coordinate with local law enforcement and local emergency management.
    - Let them know you are planning to hold a Drive-In Worship service in the parking lot.
    - Determine if you need an emergency vehicle on the property and make the proper arrangements.
  - **Parking**
    - Park in every other spot.
    - There must be a spot open on the left and right of your vehicle.
    - Volunteers will direct traffic and help with parking requirements.
  - **Assessment of Volunteers and Staff**
    - Secure volunteers to direct parking and put up any signs needed.
    - Volunteers will be screened and asked questions about their health to ensure they are not ill.
  - **Facilities**
    - Restrooms may be open.
    - No playground will be open **unless an opening plan has been developed and approved by the District Superintendent. See [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return).**
  - **Physical Social Distancing**
    - Everyone, including volunteers, staff, and clergy must follow physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) at all times.
    - This means everyone must stay at least 6 feet away from each other.
    - If you are sick, stay home.
    - Participants (other than worship leaders) should be in the cab of their vehicles unless using the restroom.
    - For information on “Hybrid” Drive-in/Outdoor In-Person Worship see attachment D, section C.



- **Communication**
  - Send out the communication to your members with the service times and the rules for attendance.
  - Post the communication on your website along with the rules for attendance. If you don't have a website, post it on whatever social media platform you use.
  - Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time, including posting your bulletin on your website or social media platform and/or emailing your members the bulletin.
- **Interaction with Volunteers and Clergy**
  - Other than receiving bulletins from volunteers or dropping offering into a receptacle provided by a volunteer with arms fully extended or using alternate distance methods, there will not be any exchange of anything between those members and guests in their vehicles and the volunteers, staff, and clergy.
- **Consistent Application**
  - Plan for the enforcement of these requirements.
  - Please follow all of this TAM. We hope to help you to limit possible liabilities, and not following the guidelines may open you up to more liability.

## **VIII. ATTACHMENT D: STAGE 2 IN-PERSON WORSHIP**

### **A. Strict Protocol Requirements: Generally**

- **Individual Safety**
  - Those who are sick must stay home.
  - **Masks required for in-person worship services indoors and for persons who are not fully vaccinated outdoors.** Worship leaders may use a mask incorporating a clear shield for lip reading purposes as long as the mask fits snugly on the face.<sup>14</sup> Worship leaders should also make sure that they are properly fitted with microphones so that they may be heard.
  - Post signage at the entrance that states that no one with fever or symptoms of COVID-19 or known exposure to COVID-19 in the prior 14 days is allowed in.
  - Sanitizer stations may not be available for members and guests. Individuals need to bring their own hand sanitizer.
  - Explain to all attendees, ushers, and other worship leaders: “If you are going to touch an item that is shared, you should use hand sani-

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<sup>14</sup> An example of this kind of mask can be found here: [https://www.etsy.com/listing/822777821/window-face-mask-nose-wire-smile-mask?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=see+through+mask&ref=sc\\_gallery-1-+1&plkey=03e8f9e0f4fa6c9137ee1434ed784f0013ba8532%3A822777821&frs=1+&bes=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/822777821/window-face-mask-nose-wire-smile-mask?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=see+through+mask&ref=sc_gallery-1-+1&plkey=03e8f9e0f4fa6c9137ee1434ed784f0013ba8532%3A822777821&frs=1+&bes=1). You should be sure the mask meets medical requirements.

tizer before and after touching the item.” Airborne droplets and aerosols are the most likely means of transmission, but contact with frequently touched surfaces has not been ruled out as a transmission source. Therefore, both properly fitted face masks along with frequent hand washing or sanitizing is still advised.

- Strict physical distancing - 6 feet or more at all times.
- Post signage to provide public health reminders of social distancing, options other than in-person worship, and staying home if sick.
- Churches may have multiple services.
- Hymnals and Bibles, once cleaned, may be placed in pews if they are not shared during services
- No choirs.
- Limited congregational singing. See Attachment G for requirements. Some options for providing non-in-person singing are: soloist pre-recorded, or piped in from another empty room.
- Digital bulletins or bulletins sent ahead by mail are encouraged. Paper bulletins may be used.
- Children welcome in Stage 2. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two should not wear masks,<sup>15</sup> and therefore they are excluded from the mandatory mask requirement.
- Limited childcare in Stage 2 during the in-person worship services with additional requirements. See Attachment B.
- Sunday School increases the amount of time persons are in the building. Mitigate risk by limiting exposure time, (for instance, 90 minutes total between worship & Sunday School), moving to a different room from the worship space where aerosol particles have not been accumulating, and ensuring good ventilation, adequate distancing, and masks.
- No coffee or fellowship time in Stage 2.
- Limited restroom usage in Stage 2.
- No handshakes or hugging in Stage 2.
- Offering may be drop-off or taken up by ushers passing the plate. Attendees must maintain social distance while passing the plate using arms fully outstretched. Offering receptacles on poles are encouraged. If current alternatives are working, we encourage continuance.
- Communion (pre-packaged) in Stage 2 and the requirements are in Attachment F.
- Baptisms may occur in Stage 2 as long as physical distancing (6 feet or more) and all other requirements for in-person worship are observed. We recommend the protocol found in “Resuming Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic” produced by the Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments: <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10369/resuming-care-filled-worship-and-sacramental-life-during-a-pandemic>.
- Weddings may occur in Stage 2 as long as physical distancing (6 feet or

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

- more) and all other requirements for in-person worship are observed.
- Funerals may occur in Stage 2 also long as physical distancing (6 feet or more) and all other requirements for in-person worship are observed.
- Clean high touch areas using normal, routine cleaning methods.
- Physical distancing (6 feet or more) during dismissal in Stage 2 at a service.
- Strict physical distancing in Sanctuary seating in Stage 2.
- In Stage 2, churches may have in-person worship services while maintaining physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) at all times. In no event should any local church hold an indoor service in any location that exceeds 50% capacity of the sanctuary, chapel, or fellowship hall. The worship capacity for an outdoor service must not exceed 250 persons.
- Continue livestream and other options for most vulnerable.
- The requirements for any service in Stages 1,2, and 3 apply even when there is an off-site (private property) worship service with UMC clergy.

**B. Strict Protocol Requirements: Specifically for In-Person Worship--Indoor**

- **Health Acknowledgement**
  - Every person should review their own health before attending an in-person worship service or gathering. One of the following two methods of health acknowledgement must be used for every in-person gathering, with the exception of drive-in worship.
  - 1) Health Forms on line. We have developed a fillable Health Acknowledgement Form that anyone can complete online on the Conference website at <https://www.evc.vaumc.org/home/> . After it is completed, the form goes directly to your local clergy. If you need to complete the Health Acknowledgement Form manually, you can download it and print it and send it to the church. You can download the form from the Conference website at <https://vaumc.org/return>. If you are not able to complete the form online, call your local church clergy and complete the form over the telephone. A verbal acknowledgement will be noted by the clergy for those that can only complete this over the telephone.
  - 2) Entryway Health Acknowledgement. An entryway version of the Health Acknowledgement Form can be found at [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return). Churches may print the form in poster-size and post it at the entryways used for each in-person gathering. Persons entering must read the form, acknowledge that they can affirm ‘yes’ to all of the statements on it to a volunteer posted at the door, and provide their name and contact information, which the volunteer will record and the church will keep. HCTs will need to develop a plan for keeping persons socially distanced during this entry process. Persons who cannot affirm ‘yes’ to all the statements on the form will not be able to enter.
- **Day of the Service**
  - Before leaving to attend the limited in-person worship service, each

attendee must:

- Take his/her temperature. It must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in order to attend worship;
- If you are feeling ill, stay home; and
- Bring with you a mask (mandatory in Stage 2), hand sanitizer (if you feel you need it), and gloves (if you feel you need them).

- **Cleaning Plan**

- Before churches can provide limited in-person worship services, each church must follow the requirements for cleaning and preparing their churches outlined in the Healthy Church Team Preparation Stage [Attachment A]. Cleaning should conform to CDC Considerations for Communities of Faith: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>.

- **Service Logistics**

- Determine how you will provide the limited in-person service.
- It's tempting to think of lots of ways to enhance the service, such as projecting the words on a screen, etc. but keep in mind, the more you do, then the more volunteers and equipment you require. The risk of exposure goes up when there are more people helping and more surfaces that can be touched by those setting up. Keep it all as simple as possible.
- Determine who will be speaking and from where in advance. For example, the sharing of microphones is prohibited. Make plans for presentations based on any audio limitations.
- Determine whether you are also providing the service via Zoom, internet, or radio, how will this be conducted?
- Reduce the length of worship services to roughly 45 minutes.

- **Children's Time**

- Children's time is allowed so long as children aged two and above wear masks and maintain social distance. It is recommended that hula-hoops or tape are used to help children find their "spot."

- **Parking**

- Arrange parking so attendees can observe physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) as they travel between their vehicles and the church building.
- When leaving your vehicle upon arrival at the church, make sure to abide by physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others).
- If someone is parked beside you, wait for them to get out of their vehicle and wait for them to get 6 feet away.
- Put your mask on before you leave your vehicle and keep it on until you are back in your vehicle.

- **Assessment of Volunteers and Staff**

- Secure volunteers to direct parking and put up any signs needed.

- Volunteers will be screened and asked questions about their health to ensure they are not ill.
- **Facilities**
  - Determine whether to restrict access to certain areas of the church campus.
  - Limited childcare in Stage 2 during the in-person worship services with additional requirements as outlined in Attachment B.
  - Develop a protocol for restrooms and determine how they will be cleaned between uses or if that is practical. Physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) must be practiced.
  - Coming and Going: Ensure proper physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) can be maintained at the entrance and exit doors, restrooms, and any other common spaces.
- **Ventilation**
  - Develop a plan for improving ventilation in meeting spaces. This should include increasing air changes, opening windows, and examining HVAC options. A list of ventilation recommendations can be found at <https://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Ventilationrecommendations.pdf>. See also CDC Considerations for Communities of Faith: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>.
- **Physical Social Distancing**
  - In order to limit attendance to the federal and state-enforced capacity limits, ask that attendees contact the church to let them know they are attending so churches can limit access or add services, or both.
  - Everyone must stay at least 6 feet apart during the service.
  - Household groups are not required to be 6 feet apart.
  - If you are sick, stay home.
  - Everyone must wear a mask the entire time in the service except when partaking of communion elements, (see Attachment F). If you cannot wear a mask or you refuse to wear a mask, you cannot attend in-person worship during Stage 2.
- **Seating for the Service**
  - Attendees must sit 6 feet apart during the service.
  - Pew Seating: Everyone will sit as close to the aisle as possible at the end of each pew. There must be 6 feet between the people on each pew unless they are family members that have been together.
  - The pew in front of each person and the pew behind each person will be empty.
  - Here are how the pews need to be arranged, with the red pews representing empty pews and the “XX’s” marking where members and guests may sit. If this arrangement does not allow for 6 feet of separation between persons, it should be altered to allow that distance:

XX\_\_\_\_\_XX

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XX\_\_\_\_\_XX

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- Fellowship Seating: In settings with movable seating, arrange chairs at least 6 feet apart from one another with common space for members to walk to and from their chairs while maintaining 6-foot social distancing.
  - **Communication**
    - Send out the communication to your members with the service times and the rules for attendance.
    - Post the communication on your website along with the rules for attendance. If you don't have a website, post it on whatever social media platform you use.
    - Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time, including posting your bulletin on your website or social media platform and/or emailing your members the bulletin. Paper bulletins may be used.
  - **Interaction with Volunteers and Clergy**
    - Offering may be drop-off or taken up by ushers passing the plate. Attendees must maintain social distance while passing the plate using arms fully outstretched. Offering receptacles on poles are encouraged. If current alternatives are working, we encourage continuance.
  - **Consistent Application**
    - Plan for the enforcement of these requirements.
    - Please follow all of this TAM. We hope to help you to limit possible liabilities, and not following the guidelines may open you up to more liability.
- C. **Strict Protocol Requirements: Specifically for In-Person Worship-- Outdoor**
- **Health Acknowledgement**
    - Every person should review their own health before attending an in-person worship service or gathering. One of the following two methods of health acknowledgement must be used for every in-person gathering, with the exception of drive-in worship.
    - 1) Health Forms on line. We have developed a fillable Health Acknowledgement Form that anyone can complete online on the Conference website at <https://www.evc.vaumc.org/home/> After it is completed, the form goes directly to your local clergy. If you need to complete the Health Acknowledgement Form manually, you can download it and print it and send it to the church. You can download the form from the Conference website at <https://vaumc.org/return>. If you are not able to complete the form online, call your local church clergy and complete the form over the

telephone. A verbal acknowledgement will be noted by the clergy for those that can only complete this over the telephone.

- 2) Entryway Health Acknowledgement. An entryway version of the Health Acknowledgement Form can be found at [www.vaumc.org/return](http://www.vaumc.org/return). Churches may print the form in poster-size and post it at the entryways used for each in-person gathering. Persons entering must read the form, acknowledge that they can affirm ‘yes’ to all of the statements on it to a volunteer posted at the entry, and provide their name and contact information, which the volunteer will record and the church will keep. HCTs will need to develop a plan for keeping persons socially distanced during this entry process. Persons who cannot affirm ‘yes’ to all the statements on the form will not be able to enter.

Fully vaccinated healthcare workers and other frontline personnel who may be exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the course of their work may attend an in-person service if they are otherwise symptom-free. Fully vaccinated means that 14 days have passed since the final dose of a vaccine is administered.

- **Day of the Service**

- Before leaving to attend the limited in-person outdoor worship service, each attendee must:
  - Take his/her temperature. It must be less than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in order to attend worship;
  - If you are feeling ill, stay home; and
  - Bring with you a mask, hand sanitizer, and gloves (if you feel you need them).

- **Cleaning Plan**

- Before churches can provide limited in-person outdoor worship services, each church must follow the requirements for cleaning and preparing their churches and meeting areas outlined in the Healthy Church Team Preparation Stage [Attachment A].

- **Service Logistics**

- Determine how you will provide the limited in-person outdoor service.
- The risk of exposure goes up when there are more people helping and more surfaces that can be touched by those setting up. Keep it all as simple as possible.
- Explain to all attendees, ushers, and other worship leaders: “If you are going to touch an item that is shared, you should use hand sanitizer before and after touching the item.” Airborne droplets and aerosols are the most likely means of transmission, but contact with frequently touched surfaces has not been ruled out as a transmission source. Therefore, both properly fitted face masks along with frequent hand washing or sanitizing is still advised.
- Determine who will be speaking and from where in advance. For example, the sharing of microphones is prohibited. Make plans for

presentations based on any audio limitations.

- Children's time is allowed so long as children aged two and above wear masks and maintain social distance. It is recommended that hula-hoops or tape are used to help children find their "spot."
  - Preachers may remove their masks while preaching outdoors when distanced at least 25 feet from the nearest participant. **Once the preaching is finished, the preacher must put on their mask if they are not fully vaccinated.**
  - **Limited music leadership: See Attachment G for requirements.**
  - **Limited congregational singing with masks. See Attachment G for requirements.**
  - Determine whether you are also providing the service via Zoom, internet, or radio, how will this be conducted?
  - Reduce the length of worship services to minimize potential exposure.
  - Exit worship service in such a way as to provide 6' social distancing.
  - No hugging, handshakes, or personal contact.
  - Follow communion policy for in-person outdoor worship. [Attachment F]
  - Open tent or covering may be used.
- **Parking**
    - Follow a traffic flow plan.
    - Arrange parking so attendees can observe physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) as they travel between their vehicles and the outdoor worship space.
    - When leaving your vehicle upon arrival at the church, make sure to abide by physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others).
    - If someone is parked beside you, wait for them to get out of their vehicle and wait for them to get 6 feet away.
    - Put your mask on before you leave your vehicle. **Fully vaccinated persons may remove their masks once they have reached their seating area and are properly distanced. Masks should be worn in returning to vehicles.**
- **Assessment of Volunteers and Staff**
    - Secure volunteers to direct parking and put up any signs needed.
    - Volunteers will be screened and asked questions about their health to ensure they are not ill.
- **Facilities**
    - Determine whether to restrict access to certain areas of the church campus.
    - Keep playgrounds closed in Stage 2.
    - Limited childcare in Stage 2 during the in-person outdoor worship services with additional requirements as outlined in Attachment B.
    - Develop a protocol for restrooms and determine how they will be cleaned between uses or if that is practical. Physical social distancing (stay 6 feet or more away from others) must be practiced.
    - Coming and Going: Ensure proper physical social distancing (stay 6 feet



or more away from others) can be maintained in the entrance and exit, restrooms, and any other common spaces.

- **Physical Social Distancing**
  - In order to limit attendance to the federal and state-enforced capacity limits, ask that attendees contact the church to let them know they are attending so churches can limit access or add services, or both.
  - Everyone must stay at least 6 feet apart during the service.
  - Household groups are not required to be 6 feet apart.
  - If you are sick, stay home.
  - **Everyone who is not fully vaccinated must wear a mask the entire time in an outdoor service except when partaking in communion. If you cannot wear a mask or you refuse to wear a mask, you cannot attend in-person worship during Stage 2. All persons should be masked during singing outdoors. (See Attachment G.) Churches should not ask for proof of vaccination but use an honor system.**
  
- **Seating for the Service**
  - Attendees must sit 6 feet apart during the service.
  - Outdoor Seating: Everyone will sit in clearly marked areas for seating. There must be at least 6 feet between the people on each marked seating area unless they are family members that have been together.
  - Each person may bring their own chair or the church may provide chairs.
  - Wipe down all high touch areas after use.
  - People should be seated in marked designated area.
  
- **Hybrid Model—Both parked cars and in-person**
  - People who are high risk and/or have physical challenges may choose to remain in their car for outdoor worship (if available).
  - If you would rather stay seated in your car and have worship there, cars must have at least 6 feet apart on either side.
  - Use of FM transmitter may be helpful.
  - People in cars can bring own communion elements.
  - Cars for the hybrid model must park in clearly marked parking spaces.
  
- **Communication**
  - Send out the communication to your members with the service times and the rules for attendance.
  - Post the communication on your website along with the rules for attendance. If you don't have a website, post it on whatever social media platform you use.
  - Consider providing digital material for services ahead of time, including posting your bulletin on your website or social media platform and/or emailing your members the bulletin. Paper bulletins may be used.
  
- **Interaction with Volunteers and Clergy**

- Offering may be drop-off or taken up by ushers passing the plate. Attendees must maintain social distance while passing the plate using arms fully outstretched. Offering receptacles on poles are encouraged. If current alternatives are working, we encourage continuance.
- **Consistent Application**
  - Plan for the enforcement of these requirements.
  - Please follow all of this TAM. We hope to help you to limit possible liabilities, and not following the guidelines may open you up to more liability.

## **IX. ATTACHMENT E: NON-WORSHIP GATHERINGS**

On Wednesday, April 21, 2021, Gov. Ralph Northam amended Executive Order 72. Under this amended order, any gathering at a church, unless it is to provide essential services for low-income residents (e.g., food pantries, homeless ministries with persons being lodged at the church, etc.), is limited to 50 individuals indoors and 100 persons outdoors. That means Sunday School, Youth Groups, Board of Trustees meetings, live nativities, etc. Other groups that use the church building are also limited to 50 or fewer people indoors and 100 persons outdoors.

Requirements related to non-worship gatherings can be found on the Mission and Ministry Workgroup web page: <http://doc.vaumc.org/News2020/Nonworshipgatherings.pdf>. These requirements are consistent with this Technical Assistance Manual.

## **X. ATTACHMENT F: COMMUNION**

While the pandemic has prevented us from gathering for in-person worship, there is a hunger for the Eucharist in our congregations, a hunger to experience Christ's presence in this sacrament that changes us through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We recognize that there also are challenges to celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion, both theologically and practically, during this time. Theologically, we know that this sacrament is a powerful means of experiencing God's grace, love, forgiveness, nourishment, and sustenance. Holy Communion is a communal act of worship, in which the gathered community of faith remembers Christ's redeeming sacrificial love, confesses its sins, gives thanks for God's divine grace, and experiences a foretaste of the kingdom of God. We believe that just as God's grace is offered to all people, likewise the Lord's table is open to all people. Due to the restrictions of the number of people permitted for in-person worship, not all people can be invited to come to the Lord's Table. Additionally, clergy are not able to extend the table to persons gathered in their homes. Fortunately, while we are not able to fully gather together in person, we also have other acts of worship which invite us to participate in confession, thanksgiving and remembrance.

In these extreme times, we recognize that this is a time when a few congregations are leading the church into safely rediscovering the power of God's transforming love and grace with transformed practices and ways of being the church together. In these congregations where the Eucharist may now

be shared, we believe intentional steps should be taken to do no harm when celebrating the sacrament. Therefore, we offer these practical ways to safely preside and serve Holy Communion during Stage 2.2:

#### For Indoor Worship

- Only pre-packaged communion elements should be used. For example: <https://www.christianbook.com/christianbook-prefilled-communion-cups-box-100/pd/96133?event=ESRCQ>.
- The communion table should be prepared by volunteers using gloves and face masks/coverings.
- Pre-packaged Communion elements should be on the Communion table during the service and communion liturgy.
- Churches are encouraged to also include a loaf of bread and cup of juice on the communion table to be visibly blessed, broken, and lifted by the Presider.
- The Communion table should be at least 6 feet from where worshippers are seated.
- The Presider must wear a face mask.
- Following the consecration of elements, the pre-packaged communion elements should be moved to a table for worshippers to receive (using a tray or other container to move them from the communion table without touching them).
- Worshippers will receive the pre-packaged communion elements and return to their seat. Ushers should direct members to collect elements in such a way as to maintain 6' separation. Once seated and properly distanced, participants may briefly remove their masks (for no more than 60 seconds) by removing them by the ear loop in order to partake. Congregations may decide to do this in unison as a sign of community unity. Masks should be put on immediately following partaking. Use of hand sanitizer prior to removing masks and after replacing mask is encouraged. All other mitigation methods (distancing, good ventilation, large room, no singing/shouting/loud talking) should be observed.
- Worshippers may also choose to leave the service once they receive the elements and are invited to partake of the elements once they are in their cars, where they safely remove their masks, and are asked to dispose of the packages at their homes.
- Churches should make sure to offer prepackaged gluten-free elements for those with gluten allergies/sensitivities.

#### For Outdoor Worship

The procedure for communion in an outdoor in-person worship space is the same as for indoor worship. Churches that would like to offer the option of partaking of the elements within the outdoor worship space should develop a plan for approval by the District Superintendent. Requirements for this would include but not be limited to: social distancing, momentary removal of masks only for the purpose of receiving the elements from prepackaged containers or elements brought by the recipient from home, hand sanitation before and after receiving, and proper removal of masks so as not to touch the outside surface (i.e. removing and reattaching masks by ear loops).

#### For Drive-In Worship

To safely consecrate and distribute elements, we recommend two options:

- 1) Churches may provide pre-packaged Communion elements to be consecrated and distributed as described above in the indoor worship practices. The pre-packaged elements may be given after being consecrated where worshippers are invited to receive elements. Alternately, these pre-packaged elements can be given to worshippers as they enter the parking area.

2) Churches may also invite worshippers to bring elements from home and follow these practices for consecrating and receiving. If churches invite worshippers to bring elements from home, please also consider how to safely have elements available for any who arrive at worship without elements, so that all may safely receive the sacrament (*i.e.*, pre-packaged as described above, or other safely prepared elements as determined by HCT):

- Worshippers should arrive at worship having brought their own bread and grape juice, as well as any necessary cups and plates needed to assure that the elements of Communion are handled reverently;
- Once the Presider has consecrated the elements, the worshippers will be directed to receive the bread and juice while remaining inside their vehicles;
- The elements on the Communion table used by the Presider in the Great Thanksgiving should not be distributed to the congregation; and
- Worshippers should be mindful to reverently dispose of any unused bread or juice by (1) direction to consume them in a reverent manner following the service; (2) returning them to the earth by pouring (2 Samuel 23:16), burying, scattering, or burning.<sup>16</sup>

Health and safety should be paramount as we gather as the community of the baptized during this time of global pandemic. It is our prayer that during these unusual and imperfect times, we may celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion in ways that wisely reveal our witness to Christ our Great Physician. Together we are praying that the day will come soon when we can all safely gather as the Body of Christ.

## **XI. ATTACHMENT G: SINGING**

### **In outdoor settings:**

- Limited congregational singing. The congregation may sing in an outdoor setting if the following conditions are met: All participants are wearing well-fitting masks over their nose and mouth at all times while standing or seated at a distance of 6 feet or more. Singers are encouraged to sing *sotto voce* (ie. in a quiet voice).
  - Singing in every case should be limited in time; and
  - Participants should be informed in advance so that they may choose their tolerance level without pressure in the moment.
  - To help participants, places can be marked out ahead of time by means of chalk, tape, or other methods.
- Limited music leadership: While choirs are not yet allowed, up to 4 singers wearing masks are allowed with proper social distancing - at least 6 feet from each other (more is ideal) and 25 feet from the congregation. Persons in household groups may stand closer to each other (but not to congregation). Rehearsals must be under same conditions. These singers may be used to lead the congregational singing and/or additional music in the worship service.
  - One soloist (vocalist) may remove their mask while singing outdoors for up to 3 minutes when distanced at least 25 feet from the nearest participant. Once the singing is finished, the soloist must put on their mask. Masks are required for persons who are not fully vaccinated at all other times.
  - Up to 4 wind instruments (with masks especially designed for wind instruments) are allowed (outdoors only) at least 6 feet from each other (more is

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<sup>16</sup> See *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, p. 32.

ideal) and 25 feet from the congregation. Persons in household groups may stand closer to each other (but not to congregation). Rehearsal must be under same conditions. These instruments (up to 4) may be used to lead the congregational singing and/or additional music in the worship service.

**In indoor settings:**

- Limited congregational singing: Fully vaccinated members of the congregation may sing for 5 minutes total (about two hymns) if the following conditions are met: All participants are wearing well-fitting masks over their nose and mouth at all times while standing or seated at a distance of 6 feet or more. Singers are encouraged to sing *sotto voce* (ie. in a quiet voice).
  - Singing in every case should be limited in time (e.g. 5 minutes or less, about 2 hymns per service); and
  - Participants should be informed in advance so that they may choose their tolerance level without pressure in the moment. Congregations may accommodate by having singing only at the beginning and ending of the service.
  - Persons should not be asked for proof of vaccination. This allowance for singing will operate on the honor system.
- Limited music leadership: While choirs are not yet allowed, up to 4 singers who have been fully vaccinated and who are wearing masks are allowed with proper social distancing - at least 6 feet from each other (more is ideal) and 25 feet from the congregation. Persons in household groups may stand closer to each other (but not to congregation). Rehearsals must be under same conditions. These singers may be used to lead the 5 minute congregational singing and/or an additional 3 minutes of music in the worship service. The use of microphones to limit the need for high-exertion projection is encouraged.