



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Dear Virginia Conference,

May the Lord be with you and keep you. It is a wonderful day to be a United Methodist. I know that Virginia United Methodists are longing for the return to in-person worship. One of our highest priorities must be loving our neighbors through ensuring the safety of those who attend our services. As we reported this week, a workgroup of church leaders, medical professionals, and legal professionals have been working hard to provide guidance to help us go back to in-person worship safely. On Friday morning, the Cabinet reviewed a draft of their work and we are preparing a list of frequently asked questions this weekend.

Friday afternoon, Governor Northam announced that he may loosen the restrictions related to in-person worship on May 15, 2020. Our timetable, as United Methodists, will be phased. I will allow Drive-In worship to begin on May 24, 2020 for all churches under strict guidelines that will be released by May 15, 2020. I will also authorize some test churches (we will call them “pioneer” churches) to open on May 24, 2020 with no more than 25 people in attendance under strict guidelines that will also be released by May 15, 2020. These pioneer churches will provide much needed data for the churches in our various districts on how to open safely.

Please continue to be in prayer for those who are affected by COVID-19 and those working hard to care for them. Pray as well for those who are extending themselves to serve at great risk and great cost. Whenever we return to worship, we will have stories to tell of God’s goodness and provision in this crisis.

Peace and Blessings,
Bishop Sharma D. Lewis