



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church Response to Updated Governor's Order

May 15, 2021

Since the beginning of this pandemic, the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church (VAUMC) provided consistent requirements and guidance for local churches to stay safe and continue effective ministries. These requirements and guidelines were compatible with the Governor's Executive Orders and the advice from the CDC.

Please remember that [Executive Order 72](#) is still in effect and it has governed the use of masks and social distancing in worship as well as other gatherings. Governor Northam amended Executive Order 72 as of 12:01 a.m. this morning and we are aware that the mask mandate has been removed for those that are vaccinated, with some exceptions. This is wonderful progress and we embrace it as we move forward but we also need to be mindful of protecting all of the people of the Virginia Conference. We are still very much in a pandemic. The Conference's Post-Covid ReEntry Group (PRG) is asking all 1,175 churches to discern and make their own decisions as it relates to the relaxed face masking rule and the other relaxed rules that we expect to be in place on May 28, 2021. This date is when [Executive Order 79](#) will be in effect.

As we did last year when we empowered local churches to decide when it was appropriate to return to in-person worship using the requirements in the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM), we are now empowering the local churches to make sound decisions to continue to keep their congregations and communities safe as we see COVID-19 move from a pandemic to endemic.

During this transition, churches may make changes to their individual plans as follows:

Prior to May 28, 2021

We strongly encourage churches to continue their vigilance to keep everyone safe, including those who cannot be vaccinated, those that have decided not to be vaccinated, and children under 16 who are now starting to get vaccinated. Our recommendation is that all churches continue to worship with masks on when indoors. This is a recommendation and not a requirement. We keep everyone safe by continuing to wear a mask. We also approve singing with the mask on during this time of deliberation. We believe that local churches need time to make deliberate changes and they need time to seek wise counsel from their membership to determine what is in the best interest of the church and the community.

Some churches will be ready to remove the mask requirement now and others may be a bit more cautious and want to take it a little slower. We ask that churches continue to research the data and use the B.R.A.I.N method in making decisions (see below). This is also a time to remind everyone that we are called to "Do no harm."

While we recommend a cautious process (i.e. continue indoor worship with a mask), if churches feel it is important or warranted for their context, churches can make some changes

immediately as guided by their Healthy Church Team (HCT) and with the approval of the pastor, without District Superintendent's approval. These are steps that can be taken now:

- fully vaccinated leaders may preach without a mask ([click here](#));
- fully vaccinated persons may be unmasked in indoor and outdoor settings;
- fully vaccinated persons may sing without a mask in indoor and outdoor settings; and
- eating outdoors with individually packed meals.

If the HCT and pastor make changes, they need to be in compliance with Executive Order 72 and CDC guidelines. Please note that Executive Order 72 continues to require social distancing for all persons.

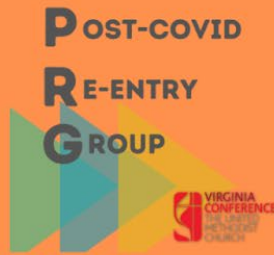
After May 28, 2021

We ask churches to activate local church Post-COVID Re-Entry Group (PRG) teams (the planned successor to HCTs) to draft plans for ministry to be used after May 28, 2021. The Annual Conference PRG team will work with the Bishop and Cabinet to provide resources and a revised, shorter Technical Assistance Manual by May 19, 2021, to assist the local churches in their decision-making and to formulate a plan for life after May 28, 2021. The Re-Launch Webinar planned for May 20, 2021, will be dedicated to explaining and assisting the churches in their deliberations. Here is the Relaunch Webinar [Registration link](#).

We trust local churches' decisions to provide safe spaces for all to worship our Lord and to be a beacon of hope to their communities. At the same time, we ask you to remember that, should the positivity rate rise or more variants of COVID-19 emerge, the Bishop and Cabinet retain the discretion to reinstitute mitigation measures, such as wearing a mask indoors and outdoors, no singing, etc. We certainly hope that we do not need to roll back anything but it will be dictated by science and keeping our members and the community safe.

Thank you for your faithfulness in such times. Let us continue to strive, 'United in One,' to share the hope of Jesus to this world!

In Christ,
Bishop, Cabinet, & the PRG Team



USE YOUR 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?

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT

WWW.VAUMC.ORG/PRG