



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

POST OFFICE BOX 5606
10330 STAPLES MILL ROAD

GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA 23058-5606

Sharma D. Lewis
RESIDENT BISHOP

TELEPHONE: 804/521-1102
FAX: 804/521-1178
E-MAIL: terribiggins@vaumc.org

November 9, 2020

An Update on Return to In-Person Worship

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

I am pleased to report that as we continue to emphasize safety and best health practices throughout the Conference, a growing number of churches have been successfully returning to in-person worship.

With the weather getting colder, now is the time for many churches that have been performing outdoor services to start the transition to indoor services and gatherings. Pastors that have not already done so should consider contacting your District Superintendent and developing a plan with your Healthy Church Team to be approved. We can be indoors, worshiping in sanctuaries, chapels, and fellowship halls, with proper protocols and do it safely.

Currently approximately 70 percent of our churches are meeting in-person, through drive-in worship or another form of physically distanced worship service. This percentage has continued to climb over the summer as pastors and local churches have observed Conference policies and procedures that are focused on keeping members, guests, and communities healthy and safe.

As a reminder, the policies and procedures for safe worship services are stated in the Technical Assistance Manual (TAM). Today the [TAM has been amended](#) to facilitate *outdoor* congregational singing and the use of Bibles and hymnals at indoor worship services.

Outdoor congregational signing, including caroling, can be done if singers are masked, distanced, and positioned in a line. Hymnals and Bibles may be used inside a church if they are placed in pews 24 hours before the service and are not shared. Please consult the TAM for further information and details.

In these difficult times, our churches continue to find ways to meet their mission and perform ministries in their communities in creative and truly God-inspired ways. I ask that you pray for your pastors and lay leaders as they are remaining calm, loving, and creative in incredibly stressful times.

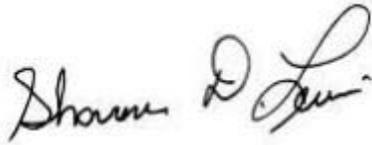
Please pray for me, the District Superintendents, the In-Person Worship Work group and the Mission & Ministry Work group as we continue to adapt to this pandemic and maintain the health and safety of our lay members, clergy, and local churches. Conference resources for local churches concerning COVID-19 were created through consultation with a variety of disciplines and are available to you at: <https://vaumc.org/return/>.

I, and the rest of the conference leadership, fully support our pastors and local churches who continue to decide the best ways for them to worship whether it be in-person or through virtual avenues. Please contact your local clergy and your District Superintendent if you have questions or want to learn

more about options for your church family. You can learn more about the work of the In-person and Mission & Ministry Work groups as well as our current worship approach and restrictions through this recorded Town Hall: <https://livestream.com/vaumc/townhall>.

Let us continue our witness in whatever format as we trust and hope in our God who can do more than we can even imagine. Please look for additional guidance from me as we move into our Advent season later this month.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis