Returning to In-Person Worship
Resources for Smaller Membership Congregations

The Bishop's Back to In-Person Worship Workgroup invited a handful of pastors serving smaller membership congregations in the Virginia Conference to share ideas and best practices gleaned from their church's return to in-person worship, and the various modes of virtual worship they are using. The following is a summary of the ideas we received, as well as other helpful information. The pastors that shared their experiences are willing to connect with others who have questions or need support. Their contact information is at the end of this document.

This compilation is a work in progress, and we invite others to join the conversation. If you serve or worship in a small membership church and have resources or expertise that might be helpful to others, please send an email to NancyJohnson@vaumc.org. Thanks for your help.

Multiple Modes of Worship: In these challenging days, many churches that are worshipping in person are also trying to maintain the other modes of worship they launched during the early days of the pandemic when we could not gather in person.

1. Churches are continuing to use **FM Transmitters/amplifiers** for Drive-In/Parking Lot worship for those who do not yet feel comfortable gathering in person. Equipment can be purchased on Amazon (additional information is below).
2. **Restream IO** allows churches to stream their services to multiple platforms simultaneously (i.e. Zoom, Facebook, etc.) with the use of one camera. More information is available at https://try.restream.io/get-started-brand-v1/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=10757422509&utm_content=454488270464&utm_term=restream%20io&gclid=Cj0KCQiA4L2BBhCvARIsAO0SBdYjwB4XGKJB0YeWhSgJKgMYa-Nfbof82_zRfUbc2Nn4HeCWob8wyWIaAvKcEALw_wcB
3. **Sermon by Phone** is a convenient and affordable way to provide an audio recording of the worship service for people who do not have access to internet/online services. Sermon by Phone assigns the church a toll-free phone number for a small monthly fee. The number can be accessed 24/7 from any phone to hear a recording of the service uploaded each week by the church (in mp3, wav, or mp4a formats). The length of the recording is not limited, but only one recording at a time can be posted. For more information or to set up an account, email guy@sermonbyphone.com. Switched On Network also offers a similar over-the-phone option at https://www.switchedonnetwork.com/2020/03/18/coronavirus-create-a-phone-number-which-plays-podcasts-or-sermon-recordings-over-the-phone/

District, Conference and General UMC Resources:
1. Some of our Districts have posted HCT Return Plans on their websites, as well as other COVID-19 resources that might be helpful to you.

a. On the **Richmond District website** (www.richmonddistrictumc.org) under *Resources,* select the *shared drive* to access HCT plans and ministry ideas from churches across the district. The *RD Reopening Database* provides in-person worship details by church, cataloged in chart form for easy reference.

b. The **Bi-District Alexandria & Arlington website** (www.novaumc.org) has many resources to share. In the *COVID-19* menu, you will find links to sample HCT plans, communion supplies, safety equipment, radio transmitters, digital ministry resources and more. The Sample HCT plans are organized by topic (i.e. In-Person Worship/Smaller Church, Recording for In-person, Outdoor Worship, etc.) so that specific kinds of plans can be found more easily.

c. Other districts in the conference may have additional resources on their websites. A list of districts with links to websites is available at https://vaumc.org/districtoffices/

2. The Virginia Conference website (www.vaumc.org) continues to provide updated information for all churches.

   a. Visit https://vaumc.org/return/ for the latest information on returning to in-person worship.

   b. The *Ministry and Mission webpage* has resources to assist churches in planning in-person events and activities other than worship at https://vaumc.org/MM/.

   c. The *Digital Hub* on the VA Conference website has many helpful resources to assist churches with specific technology issues: Resource Hub - VAUMC

   d. The *VA Conference Communications Office* offers communication and technology resources for the local church at https://vaumc.org/communications-resources/. Email the Communications Office to learn more about training opportunities and additional resources at communications@vaumc.org.

   e. The Conference Business Office has information to assist churches with online giving at https://vaumc.org/online-giving-solutions-for-churches-offered-through-vanco/

3. **The United Methodist Church** website at www.umc.org also has helpful resources:

   a. On the *Resource UMC* page (ResourceUMC), select *"Topics"* to find links to help the local church with web ministry/social media: Web Ministry and Social Media (resourceumc.org) and a Coronavirus/COVID-19 link with helpful articles and information: https://www.resourceumc.org/en/topics/helping-your-church-respond-to-the-coronavirus.

   b. The Communications Office (UMCom) provides training and support for your church's overall communications, web and digital ministry: https://www.resourceumc.org/en/agencies/communications.

   c. The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) has partnered with *Subsplash* to provide churches with extensive tools for digital engagement. Learn more here: General Council on Finance and Administration (gcfa.org)

4. **Pastors who are willing to help:** The following pastors are available to answer questions and share details regarding their church's return to in-person worship or specifics about various forms of virtual worship they are using:
    a. David Edinger (Zion UMC, Lynchburg District): DavidEdinger@vaumc.org. Drive-in worship with FM transmitter; Indoor, in-person worship following TAM; virtual worship using Zoom and Facebook through Restream IO
    b. Mike Evans (East Culpeper Charge, Charlottesville District); MikeEvans@vaumc.org. Drive-in worship using FM transmitter/sound board; in-person indoor worship streamed to Facebook live; pre-recorded audio of services using digital recording in sound system and made available through FreeConferenceCall.com for those without internet.
    c. Tom Frost (Southern Albemarle Charge, Charlottesville District) TomFrost@vaumc.org. One church is Drive-in only; one is meeting in-person, indoor; we provide a joint online worship service with pre-recorded hymns used for both drive-in and indoor worship; Order of worship emailed to congregation ahead of time; we use Movavi software to mix vocal and accompaniment audio files for service music; we created a District-wide virtual choir hymn for Christmas Eve worship with plans to provide something similar for Easter.
    d. Nancy Johnson (Emmanuel UMC, Lynchburg District): NancyJohnson@vaumc.org. Currently not worshipping in person; pre-recorded services uploaded to YouTube/Facebook/church website; Sermon by Phone available for those without internet access; full-text order of worship mailed each week to those who cannot access online worship.
    e. Brenda Laws (Greenbackville Charge, Eastern Shore District): BrendaLaws@vaumc.org. Two small churches currently worshipping in person following the TAM; using pre-recorded music for both, and projector/screen for worship elements.
    f. Bill McClung (Courtland UMC, James River District): BillMcClung@vaumc.org. Drive-in worship with FM transmitter/broadcaster; pre-recorded services uploaded to Facebook and YouTube; in-person, indoor worship following the TAM.
    g. Mark Tinsley (Amelon UMC, Lynchburg District): MarkTinsley@vaumc.org. Has extensive knowledge and expertise with audio/video equipment and willing to answer questions.