



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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July 9, 2020

Greetings in the name of Christ, Virginia United Methodists!

In the midst of a prayer for deliverance from enemies, the psalmist says, “I will sing a new song to you, O God.” [Psalm 144:9, NRSV] Indeed, we are learning to sing a new song as we offer our own prayers for deliverance from the current pandemic. Even our singing is changing as we adapt and combat the virus that has come among us.

The work group that I assigned to plan for our return to in-person worship and gatherings has been learning a lot as it has received feedback from churches and as it continues to study the best resources from medical and church professionals and businesses. I want to share with you some updates based on the collection of this data.

Last week, I announced that the Virginia Annual Conference would remain in Stage 2 of our plan, even though the Commonwealth of Virginia has moved to its own Phase 3. I did this because there are many things to consider for in-person gatherings in enclosed spaces for significant lengths of time and the precautions we have introduced are still appropriate. We should expect that four basic areas, which are key to any regimen that allows people to gather, will continue for some time:

1. hygiene (washing hands, not touching surfaces, not touching your face)
2. social distancing (6 feet or more away from others/no touching)
3. face coverings (cloth face coverings that cover the nose and mouth); and
4. limited health screening for COVID-19 only (protects everyone).

Our Technical Assistance Manual (TAM) for local churches gives specifics for each of these, and while the procedures may seem cumbersome, they have allowed many churches to move with confidence into healthy and safe in-person gatherings.

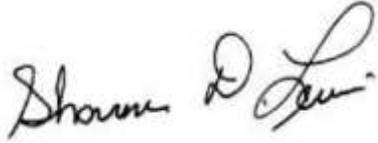
Today, I am also announcing a choice in how we gather COVID-19 health information for those that attend an in-person worship service (not a drive-in service) or an in person gathering. The first choice is to use the [online health form on the EVC page](#) prior to attending any in-person gathering. This health form has now been simplified to allow everyone to review four (4) statements and affirm their health with a single button. The form is then sent to their local church clergy person.

The second choice is that churches may now choose to download a poster of this new health form at www.vaumc.org/return. [It is also attached to this letter.] Churches may then reproduce and post this form at church entrances for gatherings, as many businesses are doing. As people arrive, each person reads the poster and acknowledges their health to a greeter who will record their name and contact information. All persons, including visitors, will be welcome to attend using this simplified system if they can respond positively to the statements on this poster and if they are willing to socially distance and wear face coverings. The Technical Assistance Manual has been updated to reflect this new procedure.

We all long for the day when something like normal will return, but this day of the ‘new song’ has gifts of its own. We are learning to trust God more, to respond to the movement of the Spirit, and to remember the commission that Christ has given us. In the meantime, we are saving lives by preventing outbreaks that threaten our members and our communities.

Thank you for your patience, your creativity, and your prayers. Know that I am praying for you and for this great Conference. We are getting through this together. Thank you all for working together to promote a healthy worship experience.

In Christ,

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

Sharma D. Lewis

attachment: [Health Acknowledgement Form Poster](#) (English)

attachment: [Health Acknowledgement Form Poster](#) (Spanish)