March 26, 2020

**RE: Essential Personnel Childcare Services during the COVID-19 Emergency**

The Bishop and the Cabinet of the Virginia Conference recognize that childcare facilities on United Methodist Church property may want to respond to the COVID-19 emergency by continuing to operate under the new restrictions introduced by the Commonwealth of Virginia with particular emphasis on serving the children of essential personnel. We offer these guidelines for such situations.

**The Actions of the Commonwealth of Virginia**

On Thursday, March 19, 2020, Governor Northam declared a state of emergency for Virginia, providing increased flexibility to ease regulatory requirements and procurement rules, continued federal and multi-state coordination, and ensuring continued access to critical services for the most vulnerable Virginians.

In addition, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Commissioner issued a letter for childcare providers operating in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which included limits on group size to ten (10) and stringent public health guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. An additional FAQ document from VDSS detailing the measures childcare facilities must follow is available. One of your priorities is to provide childcare for children of “essential personnel” as those personnel are described by VDSS.

**Childcare facilities on UMC property must follow these additional guidelines:**

1. Encourage children, parents/guardians, and staff to protect their personal health and the health of others by staying home if they are sick and send anyone home who becomes sick;

2. Educate your childcare community and staff of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Conduct regular health checks of staff and children to look for symptoms of sickness and fever. Separate symptomatic people until they are picked up from the facility;

3. Classroom childcare settings must limit capacity to 10 individuals per room to include staff. Under the Safe Sanctuary policies of the Virginia Conference of the UMC, the ratio must be an 8:2 ratio (8 children:2 adults) per classroom;

4. Alter programming to increase distance between children;

5. Have staff and children wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;

6. Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched;

7. Ensure that students are eating meals in the classroom; and
8. Besides the entities listed for contact, if a child, parent/guardian, or staff member develops COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, the childcare director must immediately report it to the pastor, the District Office, and Rev. Tom Joyce, Assistant to the Bishop. Rev. Joyce’s contact information is: TomJoyce@vaumc.org.

We recognize these are extraordinary times and those who work in childcare settings are offering a critical service to the larger community. We give thanks for those who offer care to the children of essential personnel at this time and pray God’s blessings upon them. For questions, contact your local pastor or your district superintendent.

Signed:

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis
Cabinet of the Virginia Conference

Full Links to Documents

