



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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### **Frequently Asked Questions Virginia Conference COVID-19 Precautions March 16, 2020**

Below are Frequently Asked Questions about actions The Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church is taking to protect congregants and to continue ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these precautions are expected to remain in place for some time, until this crisis is clearly over. This document is also updated periodically.

#### **Important Dates:**

- **Sunday, March 22 & Sunday, March 29, 2020- In-person worship services are cancelled**
- **Monday, March 16 - Saturday, March 23-churches remain open as necessary to attend to business with no groups over 10 meeting**
  - **Preschools closed until March 30**

- **Where do I find information about Virginia Conference information and precautions against COVID-19?**

All updates from Bishop Lewis concerning COVID-19 and directives for local churches can be found at: <https://vaumc.org/Coronavirus2020>.

- **Does the Bishop's Office/conference center want to know if there are cases of COVID-19 in the Virginia Conference?**

Yes. First, report any known coronavirus cases to the local health department by clicking <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/>. Next, communicate to your district superintendent and to the conference office by contacting Tom Joyce, Assistant to the Bishop, at [TomJoyce@vaumc.org](mailto:TomJoyce@vaumc.org) or 804- 521-1103.

- **Have local church worship services been cancelled?**

In-person church services have been cancelled for Sunday, March 22, 2020 and for Sunday, March 29, 2020 due to the [recent March 16 guidelines](#) from the CDC and President Trump calling for no

gatherings of more than 10 people for 15 days. These dates may be extended as the Bishop and Conference leaders continue to monitor this very fluid COVID-19 situation.

All churches are encouraged to provide online worship opportunities and many are doing so. A sampling of these churches can be found on the [conference website](#).

- **Are meetings and events cancelled at local churches?**

During the weeks of March 16, 2020 and March 23, 2020, our churches have the option to remain open and attend to business in small groups (10 or less) and with proper social distancing or the option to reduce their hours as they see fit.

Clergy and laity should not allow gatherings larger than 10 people during this time.

On March 16, 2020, [President Trump and the CDC announced](#) that for 15 days there should be no gatherings of more than 10 people. These requirements may lead to many event cancellations, especially dinners. Weddings and funerals will be restricted to 10 people or they should be postponed. Please use your discretion, remember the gathering size restrictions and make sure to use proper social distancing. Other church events can go on at the discretion of the clergy such as AA meetings, small group Bible studies, normal church meetings, etc. while limiting these to 10 people.

In light of this announcement, churches should make use of online options for church meetings. The entire Google G-Suite comes free with members and clergy who have @vaumc.org accounts. Google Meetings has removed the cost for its system through July 1. Google Meeting does not require your participants to have a Google account.

Another option is Zoom which is free for unlimited meetings and up to 100 participants as long as your session does not exceed 40 minutes. Zoom has an app available on both IOS and Android.

On March 15, 2020, the [CDC advised against gatherings of 50 or more](#) for the next eight (8) weeks.

**THIS GUIDANCE HAS NOW BEEN OVERRULED BY THE MARCH 16, 2020, CDC GUIDANCE LIMITING GATHERINGS TO 10 OR LESS FOR THE NEXT 15 DAYS.**

- **Should weddings and funerals be cancelled?**

All clergy and local churches in the Virginia Conference should use discretion and best practices when holding weddings and funerals at this time and during the next 15 days; these are limited to 10 people. Handle each funeral and wedding case by case, ensuring that you are working with the families concerning their needs and how best to protect their health and well-being. Be mindful of church seating capacity and try to observe a three-foot distance between members and guests while seated and/or standing. Social distancing is an important component to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Be sure to also make use of the whole church. If churches have chapels, make use of these spaces as well. At funerals, be mindful of grieving families and practice sensitivity as these should be ceremonies of comfort especially through the expression of hugs.

- **Are preschools directed to shut down?**

Preschools are to be closed until at least March 30, 2020. Churches with preschools should be consulting their leadership on numerous issues for the employees that will not be working. If the preschool has paid time off or other benefits for employees that are out of work, think about using those. Some employees may also qualify for unemployment compensation. If the local church wants to seek donations to pay these employees while they are out, that would be a good thing to discuss as well.

- **Should food pantries shut down?**

Churches should use best practices by continuing to monitor the advice and directives from our local, state, and national leaders and err on the side of caution to ensure that the facility is doing more good than harm. Take necessary precautions to make sure that food and other products remain safe for members, guests, and volunteers. Ensure that you have materials such as soap, hand sanitizer, tissues, covered waste bins, latex gloves (if available) and face masks (if available) for volunteers and those

being served by the pantry. From March 16-31, 2020, the number of people than can be in the food pantry at any one time is 10.

You also should clean frequently touched surfaces and objects (counters, door knobs, light switches) daily. Dishes and/or silverware should be washed in hot water immediately after use or after an event either by machine or by wearing gloves. Trash should immediately be disposed (bagged, sealed, and taken to a dumpster) at various intervals during the day.

Learn more about cleaning and disinfection recommendations from the CDC [here](#).

- **What should I do if I think have COVID-19?**

See your doctor and contact the [VA Department of Health](#) immediately.

- **What should I do if someone I know has COVID-19, or if I think someone has it?**

Please urge that person to see a doctor immediately and contact the Department of Health.

- **What information does the conference have about COVID-19 screening tests?**

Due to rapidly escalating concerns associated with the coronavirus (COVID-19), Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI) has directed Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield to waive all health plan member costs for the COVID-19 diagnostic test. Accordingly, any member enrolled in any of the Virginia Conference-sponsored health plans (including the high deductible HSA plan) who is directed by a medical provider or hospital to have a COVID-19 screening test, will have no out of pocket costs for the test. Accordingly, it is recommended that health plan members call their doctor in advance to ask how to obtain the screening.

VUMPI also encourages health plan members to consider using [LiveHealth Online](#), which is a covered service under the Conference-sponsored health plans. With LiveHealth Online, health plan members can use a smartphone, tablet or computer (with a webcam) to be evaluated by a board-certified physician. Please contact a member of VUMPI staff (804-521-1100) if you have questions or if any additional information is needed.

- **Who do I contact if I have questions?**

Direct your questions to your district superintendent. Contact information can be found here: <https://vaumc.org/Districts>.

- **Where can I find COVID-19 information from national and state leaders?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is updating information daily at: <https://www.cdc.gov/>.

More information from Virginia Department of Health: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>.

More information is available with the National Institutes of Health at: <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>.

Information from Virginia Governor Ralph Northam can be found at: <https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus-updates/>.