THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Dear Virginia Conference,

This worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has forced both secular and faith communities to change the way we go about our work as we focus on the safety and well-being of individuals inside and outside of our communities.

On March 23, 2020, Governor Northam instituted more changes for the Commonwealth of Virginia which includes the closure of K-12 schools for the rest of the academic year and the closure of "non-essential" businesses as of midnight on March 24, 2020 for 30 days.

In light of these recent developments,

- **In-person worship services are cancelled on all United Methodist Church properties for the next 30 days.** This includes Holy Week services. We will revisit the possibility of re-opening our churches for in-person worship on or before April 23 when the state ban is scheduled to be lifted. Meetings in the church parking lot, "drive-in" worship services and drive-in communion are not allowed on church property during this period.
- As for our preschools, the Cabinet and I recognize that childcare facilities on United Methodist Church property may want to respond to the current COVID-19 emergency by re-opening on March 30, 2020, or soon after, under the new restrictions introduced by the Commonwealth of Virginia with particular emphasis on serving the children of essential personnel. Full information about these new restrictions can be found in the FAQ document on the conference website. We offer these guidelines for such situations:
    - 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;
    - 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;
    - 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;
    - Alter programming to increase distance between children;
    - 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;
    - Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are frequently touched;
    - Ensure that students are eating meals in the classroom; and
    - 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 the Rev. Tom Joyce, Assistant to the Bishop. The Rev. Joyce's contact information is: TomJoyce@vaumc.org.

- The Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) recognizes the impact that the pandemic is having on local churches in the Virginia Conference. After meeting over the last week, CFA is responding by prioritizing the apportionments for 2020 in an effort to relieve the impact our local churches are experiencing. By prioritizing apportionments, this will allow churches to pay the critical and essential amounts to support the Virginia Conference clergy and connection. CFA has divided apportionments into "Priority 1", making up 72.77% of the total apportionment with the remainder categorized as "Priority 2." Local churches will be asked to first pay into Priority 1, and they will be considered having paid 100% of the 2020 apportionment if the Priority 1 amount is paid in full. CFA is encouraging churches to pay into Priority 2 as their financial situation allows. The overall Conference Apportionments for 2020 has not changed, just strategically prioritized. Apportionment details have been shared by the conference Treasurer's Office.
- Churches must abide by the mantra "**10 people or less and 6 feet distancing**" whether officiating a funeral or wedding, conducting a meeting or overseeing a food pantry.
- Visit the CDC website for facility cleaning tips if there has been suspected/confirmed COVID-19 cases.

I highly encourage you to view our COVID-19 FAQ sheet on the conference website where all of this new information has been updated. Please use this document to stay aware of current directives from the conference and how best to safely carry out the ministry of your local church.

I also ask that we continue to be flexible as a conference as the COVID-19 situation remains fluid and our guidance and directives may change.

I thank you for all of the work that has been happening around the Commonwealth. Together, we will get through this crisis.

Please continue to join me in daily prayer at 12 noon to eradicate this disease. The prayer is on our Virginia Conference website.

Peace and Blessings,
Bishop Sharma D. Lewis