From: EOC Communications
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East Ohio Conference
The United Methodist Church

A Message from
Bishop Tracy S. Malone and the EOC Cabinet



Helpful Guidance to Pastors and Churches

We celebrate the power of the creative God, the redeeming Christ and the animating Spirit evidenced through the creativity, adaptation and energy of the clergy and laity of the East Ohio Conference. Throughout this global crisis of the COVID-19 virus, you have lived by the Word of God, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39) You have embodied the love of Christ as you have: cared for neighbors and strangers alike in contributing to the healing of body and soul; increased your technological knowledge and capacity for the proclamation of the Gospel; and been the church without walls. We can hear God's voice and echo it, "Well done, good and faithful servants." (Matthew 25:23)

The following guidelines are based upon the most current best practices as communicated by the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Ohio Department of Health. Please employ them in conversation with your local church "pandemic protocol" team so that they are most applicable to your context and are communicated to your congregations and communities completely, clearly, and consistently. We are each invited to take personal responsibility for the wellbeing of us all. These guidelines are provided so that the covenant community of United Methodists in East Ohio may continue to minimize risk, stamp out disease, and step into God's new thing – a truly post-COVID-19 pandemic world – with confidence and hope.

1. Attendance at Worship, Study and Fellowship
    1. Persons who are not feeling well or are exhibiting symptoms of the coronavirus should remain at home.
    2. Congregations are encouraged to continue to offer alternate options for engagement – ie. livestreaming, Zoom access, video recordings, all-call phone access, etc.
    3. Signs should be posted on entrances to the church building encouraging all to adhere to the current protocols.
2. Face Masks

    1. Face masks are no longer required for those persons who have been fully vaccinated. *Fully vaccinated = two weeks past the date of a person's final COVID-19 vaccine shot.*
    2. The wearing of face masks is encouraged for those who are not fully vaccinated and/or have health vulnerabilities.
        1. In the same way that the safety of our elders has been honored throughout this global crisis let us demonstrate the same concern for our children who have yet to be vaccinated as well as persons who are immunocompromised.
    3. Please honor the safety and preference of those persons who, for personal reasons, choose to continue to wear face masks.
3. Social Distancing
    1. We recognize the need for honoring personal space in all times and spaces.
    2. Appropriate social distancing is encouraged.
    3. Greet one another in the joy of Christ and with mutual agreement as to the method.
4. Offertory
    1. We celebrate the returning of God's gifts to God's work as an act of worship.
    2. Continue to explore and employ "touchless" methods of sharing tithes and offerings.
5. Holy Communion
    1. To keep the Lord's Table safe and accessible to all persons, continue to employ the use of single serving (pre-packaged) elements.
6. Singing
    1. John Wesley encouraged believers, "Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing God more than yourself…" (John Wesley's *Select Hymns,* 1761)
    2. In all our worship let us aim to "please God more than ourselves." Employ the best scholarship, proven practices, and prayerful conversation as you discern how best to worship God through song.

As we step into this new territory, we invite you to do so as those who have been shepherded by God through a wilderness. In the desert land we have received the gifts of sustenance, presence, and hope at the hand of our guiding God. Let us now, in grateful response, allow God's gifts to flow through us. Let us engage our own weary spirits and one another – clergy, church members, and community partners – with patience, kindness, and understanding. Let us continue to pray for the complete eradication of this deadly virus and for those who have suffered the loss of loved ones. Let us give thanks for the ways in which the healing of the nations is at hand and for the privilege to partner with Jesus the Christ in that transforming work.

In the great name of Jesus,

Bishop Tracy S. Malone and the EOC Cabinet

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