



The Florida Conference

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Date September 8, 2020

Subject: COVID-19 Updated Guidance from the Florida Conference

Dear Florida Conference Clergy and Laity:

We continue to pray for you and your communities as we enter the sixth month since we began actively giving guidance to our churches regarding the COVID-19 virus. We pray especially for the over 637,000 persons in Florida who have experienced the COVID-19 virus and the 11,800 persons who have died.

We know this has been a very difficult season for you to navigate as clergy and lay leaders. All of us have had to adapt to this ever-changing reality and learn new ways of doing life and ministry together as a church. We have watched as you have persevered. We applaud your resilience and creativity.

Our consistent guidance has been grounded in Matthew 22, the healing ministry of Jesus and the Lord's commandment to love our neighbor. In a global health crisis, we do this by maintaining a social distance, and by honoring many of our older and more vulnerable members.

As we continue this journey together, Bishop Carter and the Cabinet, with guidance from other conference leaders and medical professionals, reaffirm that our COVID-19 safety protocols remain in place. Our COVID-19 safety [protocols](#) and [guidelines](#) are connected to the ongoing guidance and recommendations from the [Florida Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control](#).

Specifically, we want to remind you of **some key parts of our ongoing guidance**:

1. At all times persons must maintain at least six feet of distance between family groups.
2. Masks or cloth face coverings are required when any group gathers (except for children under the age of 2).
3. Monitor your symptoms. Stay home if you are sick or displaying COVID-19 symptoms. Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive should adhere to the CDC [guidelines](#) for isolation and quarantine.
4. All inside activities must be in well ventilated spaces that allow for persons to maintain at least six feet of distance between family groups. Outside activities are preferred over inside activities. See the bottom of this email for **additional notes** from one of the infectious disease experts who has consulted with us.

We ask that you please **continue to offer on-line worship and virtual ministry opportunities**. It is important that opportunities are readily available for people in your church who are not ready to return to your campus. Persons in vulnerable populations or with underlying health conditions as defined by the CDC should be encouraged to stay home.

Decisions about in-person activities will vary according to your church context. We understand there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach for every church around the conference. Contexts are different as cases rise at different rates (click here for a [county](#) and [zip code](#) break down). At all times churches should carefully follow the guidance of your city and county officials. **Any decision to resume in-person activities should be affirmed by the pastor in consultation with a team of leaders and should be communicated to your District Superintendent.** We know many of you have already communicated to your District offices your fall plans to offer a variety of hybrid models that include continued virtual ministry, outside experiences, along with limited in-person activities according to the safety protocols.

Our conference team encourages you to review the other guidance and recommendations found in the [FAQ section](#) of our COVID-19 website. This includes our guidance and recommendation around singing, schools and other activities. All of our previous [updates](#) and resources are found on our [COVID-19 website](#). If you have questions, please reach out to your District Superintendent or contact the Episcopal Office at ashanks@flumc.org.

As we enter this fall and winter season, we commit to continuing to offer guidance and resources to you. Most of all we commit to praying with and for

you in this time.

The Peace of the Lord,
Bishop Ken Carter and The Cabinet of The Florida Annual Conference

Additional Notes regarding COVID-19 from one of the infectious disease experts who has consulted with us:

One of the infectious disease experts we have consulted with continues to emphasize that large gatherings in closed indoor spaces are very dangerous, especially if there are persons present who are early in the infection timeline. During this time, anyone has the potential of being a super spreader. Super spreaders can produce more infectious aerosol when speaking and breathing and even more so when singing.

One way to mitigate these concerns for those persons planning to attend an in-person event is to more closely monitor their symptoms by performing daily temperature checks at home. If someone's temperature increases 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit or more above their normal temperature, the person should not attend the gathering. Persons with such temperature change should consider getting a COVID-19 RTPCR test or antigen test if available and as advised by their local health department or personal physician.

Finally, our expert, along with the CDC ([Flu FAQ](#)), believes it is very important to get the flu vaccine this year in order to protect yourself and the people around you from the flu and to help reduce the strain on healthcare systems responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. A coinfection of COVID-19 and the flu could be devastating.

The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church

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