

“Watching Over One Another in Love”

**A Guide for United Methodist Leaders
in the North Alabama Conference
Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic**



March 17, 2020

New Challenges and Opportunities

While the cancellation of most schools, community, and church activities may seem like a setback, as people of faith we now have one of the greatest opportunities ever presented to us to step up and be the church. Will we rise to the occasion by seeing a multitude of new opportunities for greater faithful responses to the changes in our local community?

Practice Personal and Group Safety Habits

We are hearing about “social distancing.” Maybe we should call it “healthy space,” both timely terms for the practice of avoiding the potential for spread of this highly contagious airborne virus. Let us refrain from judgment on the different ways we choose to practice social distancing as churches, while at the same time ensuring best practices for our unique communities of faith. Individually, we all know that we need to immediately take precautions to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Here is a simple personal guide called “Do the Five”

- 1 HANDS** Wash them often.
- 2 ELBOW** Cough and sneeze into it.
- 3 FACE** Don't touch it.
- 4 FEET** Stay more than 6 feet apart.
- 5 FEEL** sick? Stay home.

For the protection of our church members, visitors, and community, decrease (or eliminate) group meetings and gatherings as much as possible and increase social contacts through safer means such as teleconferencing, video, Facebook, mail, and good old fashioned phone calls. Share your glory sightings and let's inspire each other on ways that we are choosing to creatively resume public gatherings of worship as soon as possible.

Watch Over One Another in Love

John Wesley exhorted followers of Christ to walk in grace and responsibility, watching over one another in love. We know that Jesus practiced every interaction with others by seeing them through the lens of love. How can we let our “Jesus lens” be the way through which we do and see everything regarding this global health pandemic we face? Let's start by taking a deep breath, offering a prayer for our own responsiveness to these issues we are currently facing, and practice patience and love in all that we do.

Keep Your United Methodist Membership Vows

As leaders in the United Methodist Church, we need to help one another keep our vows to uphold the church through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

- **Prayers:** Pray for those at different levels who are affected: 1) the sick and those who grieve; 2) hourly workers who are unable to maintain living wages due to business cutbacks; 3) healthcare workers and first responders; 4) the elderly and those with compromised health.
- **Presence:** We are still the church but our presence changes venues. We are only suspending “in-person” onsite worship for a season. Phone calls work! Live-streamed or recorded worship services are safe and wonderful ways we can be virtually present with our community. Video conferences are free or relatively inexpensive ways we can even see and hear each other from different locations.
- **Gifts:** Remind people that our churches depend on everyone’s faithful giving to continue to step up to the challenges all around us.
- **Service:** Keep participating and find local opportunities, in addition to the financial giving which supports many ministries of service. If your church is involved in a feeding project, ensure that people whose routines have been changed (such as losing free or reduced lunches due to the school closures) can receive the help they need.
- **Witness:** Your faith in Christ is a living witness as shown in the ways you keep your baptismal and membership vows. Read scripture and share scripture regularly. Communicate your faith. Now is a golden opportunity for the body of Christ to step up and witness to the presence of Christ in the world. Share only truthful information from trusted sources and be careful what and how you communicate. More people will be reading our communications



Resources

Many resources are available to church leaders. Following is an annotated list of some helpful ones. More resources will be added to our Conference website at www.umcna.org/covid-19resources.

How does my church make a switch to online worship if we aren't currently doing this?

YouTube: The North Alabama Conference has made unique email addresses available to clergy. A umcna.org account is more than just email! It actually gives users access to an entire suite of Google Applications including YouTube. Below are links to instructions for how to set up a YouTube Channel and how to Live Stream using YouTube. These are both *free* options with a umcna.org account. Use the username and password to sign in at www.youtube.com.

- **How to create a YouTube Channel** – support.google.com/youtube/answer/1646861?hl=en
- **How to live stream on YouTube** – support.google.com/youtube/answer/2474026?hl=en

Facebook Live: The social media platform Facebook has a feature called Facebook Live that allows users to use the camera on their computer or mobile device to broadcast live video. Many congregations have opted to use this free option to broadcast worship services.

- **How to go Live on Facebook** – www.facebook.com/help/1636872026560015
- **Resource UMC Article: “Use Facebook Live to stream your church events”** – www.resourceumc.org/en/content/use-facebook-live-to-stream-your-church-events
- **Hubspot article: “How to Use Facebook Live: The Ultimate Guide”** – blog.hubspot.com/marketing/facebook-live-guide

Paid Streaming Options: There are numerous companies that provide streaming platforms to churches for a subscription fee. Some may be offering discounted or free options during this time.

Here are some how-to articles written by United Methodist pastors/bloggers in the last two weeks:

- **“Taking your worship online: A guide for beginners and everyone else”** – www.resourceumc.org/en/content/taking-your-worship-online-a-guide-for-beginners-and-everyone-else
- **“COVID-19 Lockdown: Creating Live-streamed Worship in 3 Days”** – hackingchristianity.net/2020/03/covid-19-lockdown-creating-live-streamed-worship-in-3-days.html?fbclid=IwAR2qz0SIEzrgb5ucIGiZz-bZ63zh2OA7YsZrSotj4My0kNKkl0-1QT-68QdI

Don't forget about Licensing

Churches using hymns or other copyrighted music in their online worship services must have a license to do so – just the same as is required for printed copies of protected music. Several services offer streaming licenses, ranging in price from around \$100 for churches with attendance in the 1-25 range, to near \$600 for churches with up to 1,100 in attendance. Here are links to the three prominent licensing companies' tools:

- **CCLI** – us.ccli.com
- **Christian Copyright Solutions** – christiancopyrightsolutions.com/services/worshipcast
- **One License** – onelicense.net

To help churches in this season of coronavirus challenges here are some special offers and prices:

- **United Methodist Book of Worship:** To assure that local churches have the resources they need, the United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) announced that it is granting permission to livestream and post online selected content from the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (BOW) as congregations care for their members during the international health crisis. Read more at www.umph.org/Curent-News/ArtMID/471/ArticleID/43/The-United-Methodist-Publishing-House-Grants-Temporary-Permission-for-UM-Book-of-Worship-Content
- **CCLI:** CCLI is offering a 10% discount on the first full year of a streaming license for any church wishing to add on to their existing CCLI Copyright License. This offer ends April 30. Read more at <https://mailchi.mp/ccli.com/need-to-stream-your-service-resend?e=ccd311dad6>
- **One License:** One License is offering a free license, through April 15. Read more at news.onelicense.net/2020/03/13/one-license-offers-gratis-licenses-to-help-cope-with-covid-19-challenges-valid-through-april-15/

What are some options for teleconference calls for meetings, Bible Studies, small groups etc.?

Google Hangouts Meet: One of the online applications a umcna.org Google account provides is Google Hangouts Meet. It is free online video conferencing system with little to no restrictions. There is also a companion app for iPhone and Android devices. With a umcna.org account, you are always the host! In response to the coronavirus pandemic Google Meet has been opened up for larger meetings (up to 250 participants) and live streaming through July 1. Use your umcna.org account username and password to sign in at meet.google.com

- **Get started with Hangouts** – support.google.com/hangouts/answer/2944865?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform=Desktop#
- **Video: Hangouts keeps you connected** – www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2-tsGelk4U

Zoom is an online platform for video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars. Zoom has a free service with limits on meeting length and number of participants but has paid options with more features and capacity. Find out more at <https://zoom.us>.

Instant Conference is a basic conference call system that allows a group of participants to connect via telephone. The free option limits you to five participants per call. There is a paid option (only \$9.95 per month) that will allow calls with up to 150 participants with up to 2,000 minutes of conference call time each month. Find out more at www.instantconference.com.

Discipleship

Amplify Media is a United Methodist multimedia platform with a wealth of Bible study materials. It is an offering of the United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) and offers high quality, searchable content with an emphasis on Wesleyan perspectives for church-wide, group, or individual use on any device at any time. The content includes videos, podcasts, audio books and other digital media developed by UMPH and local churches. There are even subscription levels that will allow your church to upload content! Amplify Media offers a 14-day free trial. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Amplify has made several resources free and accessible for churches to participate in a church-wide or group study and children's content to keep young ones engaged in the Bible. Find out more at amplifymedia.com.

The North Alabama Annual Conference Adult Discipleship Team, at the invitation of Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, has developed two initiatives to help people grow in their daily holy habits.

- **Read Together** is in its second year and is an opportunity to read through the entire Bible in a year. It includes daily Bible readings and each week there is a podcast by a North Alabama clergy or lay person sharing their thoughts on the reading. The podcasts are archived, so it's not too late for someone to join in! More information is available at www.umcna.org/readtogether. Podcasts are available at umcna.podbean.com/.
- **Pray Together** offers participants many opportunities to expand their prayer lives. Each week a new prayer practice or prayer focus will be the subject of a podcast or a video featuring leaders within our Conference as well as guests from trusted organizations such as the Upper Room. More information is available at www.umcna.org/praytogether. Podcasts are available at prayingtogether.podbean.com.

Financial Resources and Giving:

Here is an article from Discipleship Ministries that offers a list of ideas specifically directed to church financial leaders across the church to help with sustaining the church and its ministry as we live through these Coronavirus days.

- **"10 Ideas for Church Financial Leaders Amid the COVID-19 Crisis"** – www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/10-ideas-for-church-financial-leaders-amid-the-covid-19-crisis

UMCOR continues to be at work with those around the world facing the COVID-19 Pandemic. Your congregation can give to the global fund or the US fund.

- **UMCOR Advance #3021770 Abundant Health (Global)**
- **UMCOR Advance # 901670 US Disaster Response and Recovery**

Give to **UMCOR** at www.umcmmission.org/umcor/give.

GoFundMe has set up a general relief fund to directly support individuals affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as the organizations working to keep people safe, find a cure, or support their communities. Read more at www.gofundme.com/c/act/covid19.

Congregational and Community Care

Here are some practical ideas North Alabama congregations are implementing as means of caring for their congregation and community during the coronavirus pandemic.

- Have healthy, young members volunteer pick up food and supplies for older members and those facing health issues.
- Partner with schools and food pantries to make sure children and families facing food insecurity still have basic necessities.
- Organize groups within the church (including children and youth) to make hand-made cards of love and encouragement to send to nursing home residents and staff.
- Give tangible expressions of appreciation and love for the community's front line responders.

Tell Your Congregation's Story

Over the next few weeks your congregation is invited to share how you are doing creative and vital ministry during this unusual time. Each week include a brief story in the Glory Sightings field of your Weekly Benchmark Report. These Glory Sightings will become part of the rolling feed on the Conference website homepage

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39