

Important Clergy Update - Please Read ASAP

Dear Winchester District Clergy,

Greetings on this second day in October.

As you are probably aware of by now, our President and First Lady have become infected with the COVID-19 virus. In addition to this breaking news, in the last week there was also an article published in a Virginia newspaper about five members of a church who tested positive for the virus, including the pastor. They were all participants in a church band who had been practicing together weekly for worship. May we keep these seven infected individuals in our prayers. This is a vivid reminder that COVID-19 is an insidious disease that can impact the lives of those in powerful positions to a faithful musician in a local church as they share the gift of Christ through their music.

I share this with you because I realize well that there is an element of COVID-19 regulatory or safe-practices "fatigue" taking place in our culture now. Our church members and leadership are not immune from this psychological challenge. It is all-too-easy to let our guard down as we yearn for things to be back as they were before COVID-19.

However, now is the time to be diligent and faithful to *do no harm* as the people of God. Now is the time to be steadfast and be the adaptive leaders who God has called us to be as clergypersons. Now is the time to *lead* our people whom God has called us to serve.

Sometimes this means we must say "no" to a parishioner (even when we want to people-please) or "pull back on the reins" in some way where our best COVID practices have become slack. We all know that being a leader can be hard at times, and hard times require leaders to be a presence who stands in the gap and prophetically leads when others want to "go back to Egypt."

I have two requests of you. First, please reread the most current iteration of the TAM by clicking [HERE](#). Read it with an open heart and a willingness to embrace and deploy these best-practices as a means of reflecting the love and care of Christ for all God's people. Second, embrace the clergy-mission to make sure the TAM guidelines are followed. I am accountable to them as a clergyperson in the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church; you are too! To be honest, I am seeing the fatigue mentioned above unfolding and best-practices in the TAM eroding. For example, in outside worship only one person is to sing at a time, and they must be 25 feet away and have their own microphone. In the words of the TAM, "A soloist may be used in an outdoor worship, if they are masked and distanced further than 25 feet from next nearest person." In streamed/recorded worship online and in my personal worship at our churches, I have experienced this best-practice ignored at worse or "muddled" in practice at best. We can do better for God's people.

Finally, let me conclude with Good News. As I have said many times before, I believe with all my heart that God is working in the midst of this global challenge in a mysterious and glorious way. I am not minimizing the pain or loss, but I am saying that God's steadfast love and grace is trustworthy in every way... including what the future holds for us as the Children of God. There is an "old-school" gospel song that keeps echoing in my mind this morning... a reminder of real power and where it rests in Jesus Christ and His resurrection. I invite you to listen and watch The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir sing about this power by clicking [HERE](#).

Thank you for your faithful and sacrificial service as clergy-leaders. Know that you are prayed for, and I am always available for conversations with you as we navigate this challenging season of new opportunities together!

In Christ's Service,

DS Steve