

Fwd: Update to Suspension of Public Worship Gatherings and Guidelines for Communion**From:** Roseboro, Ronnie <rroseboro@wnccumc.net>**To:** bmyers14 <bmyers14@netscape.net>**Date:** Tue, Mar 24, 2020 7:51 pm

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From: Western North Carolina Conference of The UMC <enews.wnc@brtapp.com>**Date:** Tue, Mar 24, 2020 at 5:49 PM**Subject:** Update to Suspension of Public Worship Gatherings and Guidelines for Communion**To:** <RRoseboro@wnccumc.net>

Western North Carolina Conference

The United Methodist Church

March 24, 2020

Dear Western North Carolina Conference UMC Family and Friends,

The decision to suspend all in-person worship and gatherings is an effort to assist in halting the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). This change certainly creates a new set of challenges for all of us. We really are *building the bridge as we are walking across it*. One new challenge we are facing is addressing ministry needs in situations that are different from our traditional ways of doing ministry. Our District Missional Networks are needed more than ever to meet the needs of your community, to collaborate on virtual offerings, and to provide care for one another. Another challenge is how to offer the Sacrament of Holy Communion. This letter will provide suggested guidelines that should prove helpful.

Please know that your Bishop, Conference Staff, District Superintendents, Vitality Associates, District Administrators, and support staff are all available to assist and help. While we are available by email or phone, we want you to know that all in-person meetings at the Conference and District levels are either postponed or being held virtually. We strongly urge all our WNCC churches to do the same as we follow the advice of the Center for Disease Control (CDC). **Please continue to discontinue services until further notice. We will monitor the CDC's recommendations and will let you know when it's appropriate to gather in person for worship once again.**

During this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, the Church is more important than ever. Each church and ministry have a unique opportunity to serve as channels of grace, mercy, and love, as we do what Christ has commissioned us to do. If possible, please continue to offer food pantries and other resources following the guidelines of the CDC as well as [these](#) from Second Harvest Food Bank. God put us in our communities to offer Christ, especially in times of testing and crisis, and to be a shining beacon of hope in these dark times.

As difficult as it is to suspend in-person worship and to practice social distancing, it is necessary to do so to protect the larger community and therefore save lives. As we hear the news of increasing cases of infection throughout our state, it becomes more apparent that these prevention measures will not end quickly. Thus, churches need

to plan creative ways to worship and share the good news. We give thanks for the many other ways we can connect while being physically apart. The CHURCH has never been the buildings in which we worship.

By now you have heard the news that the Commission on General Conference has released a statement announcing the postponement of General Conference 2020. Please pray for Commission members as they work to schedule new dates. It is premature to make any decisions about our own Annual Conference at this point. We will offer further information regarding the WNCC Annual Conference by May 1, 2020. I will be meeting tomorrow, March 25, via conference call, with the College of Bishops to discuss plans regarding the rescheduling of General Conference and other events.

As you explore and use new technologies to engage in virtual worship, please ensure you are conducting your worship legally, as there are some different laws for livestreaming. If you are uncertain and need direction, Havaleh Havelka, our Conference Training and Resource Specialist, has compiled [these resources](#) for you.

Remember you can and should provide pastoral care by phone calls, cards, and letters. You are encouraged to connect with members and with each other in as many ways as you can. Make sure that your church leaders develop a plan for your church to care for the community while practicing social distancing. Let this time be an opportunity to develop a network of care.

Please continue and encourage Christian stewardship, making every effort to support your church's financial obligations. Urge your people to be faithful in giving and wise in spending. For this reason, our WNCC has established an online giving portal available to all our congregations, but especially to those who do not currently have a way to receive electronic contributions. Use [this link](#) and follow the prompts. Your contribution will then be forwarded to your local church.

Furthermore, the Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table will be asked to set up the WNC Connexion Clergy Relief Fund to assist churches who are struggling to pay clergy salaries due to this crisis. An online portal will be established to make gifts that will help our congregations support clergy and their families as they continue to lead our ministries.

I give thanks for the innovative ways that you are adapting to this new reality, which thankfully, will not last forever. Please know that you are prayed for daily as you care for those around you. You are not alone. Especially now, we find great hope in the promise of Jesus, "I am with you always, to the end of this age." (Matthew 28:20). "The Best of All is God is With Us." (John Wesley)

God bless,
Bishop Paul L. Leeland

HOLY COMMUNION

Extending Christian Hospitality During **the COVID-19 Crisis**

(This is only to be viewed as temporary.)

The sacrament of holy communion is essential to Christian worship. Because of the pandemic that we are currently facing and the limitations that it imposes, we are offering an alternative way to share in this means of grace. This virtual communion service is a symbolic way of allowing the body of Christ to share in the Lord's Supper. This temporary practice will allow the people of your congregation and online community to participate in Holy Communion from their homes as you lead online worship. Please note that is not a license to continue this practice when life returns to normal.

You might also consider the Wesleyan tradition of the [Love Feast](#), which recalls the many meals that Jesus shared with his disciples and expresses the fellowship enjoyed by the body of Christ.

Specific Guidelines for the Practice for Online Communion:

(It is the position of this Bishop, that this privilege is for a season and that there will be a return to traditional practices in accordance with our liturgy as soon as possible.)

Within our Wesleyan heritage, we must remember the place of Elders, Deacons and Local Pastors licensed for sacerdotal (priestly) ministries, and thus Elders and Licensed Local Pastors will continue to have the authority to preside at the table.

Instructions for Leading Online Communion

"We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him."

"We believe the Lord's Supper is a representation of our redemption, a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, and a token of love and union which Christians have with Christ and with one another. Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes." *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, Paragraph 104: Article VI – The Sacraments, pages 73-74.*

With this in mind, the members of your congregation and online community may participate in Holy Communion from their homes as you lead online worship.

Scriptural setting -

Holy Communion is celebrated in the context of worship. When you worship online, you are part of the context. When a Scriptural context has not been presented, read one of the following Scriptures, (*Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29*), along with the following directives:

1. Pastors are encouraged to lead the liturgy. You, as the pastor, should take the lead. Online Holy Communion is still a community act of worship best led by Clergy.
2. Use the Communion Liturgy of Service of Word and Table found in The United Methodist Hymnal, or the United Methodist Book of Worship.

The confession and pardon, the consecration of the bread and the cup, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit provide the opportunity for the whole community to participate in the broken body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please be sure to consecrate the elements prior to using.

3. Grape juice is preferable. (Please give prior notice to participants so that they have enough available for those worshipping in their location.) If online participants do not have grape juice, use your best judgment in recommending a suitable "fruit of the vine" replacement (like grapes). The main point is to participate in the body and blood of Christ.
4. Use bread or crackers. (Please give prior notice to participants so that they have enough available for those worshipping in their location.)
5. As with each pastor and local church, there are numerous expressions of presenting and receiving the bread and the cup, Christ's broken body and shed blood. Individual cups are encouraged but intinction may be practiced in individual home settings. Please also remember that communion may be celebrated using just one element, either the bread or the juice, but it will be important for you to explain that to those worshipping with you as they may not be aware of that practice.
6. Be sure to close the Communion Service with prayer. If the Lord's Prayer has not already been incorporated in the service, it can be used as a close to the communion time.
7. Share your experience(s) of encountering the presence of Christ during this sacrament. Sharing your experience helps all of us learn, grow and find new ways of being in relationship as the body of Christ.

Resources:

The Holy Bible

The United Methodist Hymnal

Bishop Paul L. Leeland, Western North Carolina

Bishop Tracey Smith-Malone, East Ohio

Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, West Ohio

Visit our [website](#) for ongoing updates and resources to help your congregation respond.

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