

May 14, 2020

To our brothers and sisters in the Baltimore-Washington Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ our Lord and Savior.

We are writing this letter today aware that governmental leaders in Maryland, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia have all made recent statements about the COVID-19 response in their respective areas. Those statements provide contextual guidelines and procedures for moving forward. Soon, leaders in respective counties will also likely begin to have contextualized directives. Additionally, governmental leaders are making changes to their own guidance within the respective phases, as evidenced by Phase 1 of Governor Larry Hogan's plan released on April 24, 2020, and his new plan released on May 13, 2020.

On May 7, 2020, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling provided us with a clear path to re-entering our buildings well, with a stated priority of privileging lives over other considerations and erring on the side of safety. Nothing that has been stated by any governmental entity at this point is in conflict with Bishop Easterling's statement on May 7: "I recommend that all of our local churches continue to conduct virtual worship and refrain from in-person gatherings until it is clearly safe to do so." Indeed, in Maryland, Governor Hogan recognized that based on all the contexts of worship and conditions in the state, "faith leaders may choose to implement additional and stricter rules for public worship than those permitted."

Unsurprisingly, the considerations we use in our decision-making will differ from the restaurant or local business down the street, or even from the church across town. As the Re-Entering Well Guidelines indicate, there is much to be done before congregations can safely re-enter their buildings. These processes and considerations are outlined in that resource, which can be accessed online at www.bwcumc.org/re-entry.

Regardless of what phase or stage a governmental entity designates for your jurisdiction, **the safety steps must be fully observed**. In practice, this means that even if indoor worship is permissible under the jurisdictional plan, it should not be undertaken if the safety protocols in the Re-entering Well Guidelines are not yet in place in your congregation.

Because it will now be incumbent upon you as congregational leaders to make decisions and take action for your specific context, we are providing an additional resource. The attached Re-Entry Decision Tree can be used in conjunction with the BWC Re-entering Well materials referenced above.

As your district superintendents, we want to acknowledge that the decisions you have made to privilege the lives of your congregation and community are commendable. We, as superintendents, have seen the incredible ways you have adapted worship and ministry to be the Body of Christ in the midst of this pandemic. We are grateful for the amazing collaboration we have seen between lay and clergy leadership. We are in prayer for you, and desire to be in conversation with you if you have questions or concerns, so please reach out. May God's peace that passes all understanding be with you.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Rebecca Iannicelli, Annapolis District and Dean of the Cabinet
Rev. Johnsie Cogman, Washington East District
Rev. Wanda Duckett, Baltimore Metropolitan District
Rev. Gerard Green, Greater Washington District
Rev. Ann LaPrade, Baltimore Suburban District
Rev. JW Park, Central Maryland District
Rev. Edgardo Rivera, Frederick District
Rev. John Wunderlich, III, Cumberland-Hagerstown District