



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

North Texas Annual Conference
P.O. Box 866188
Plano, Texas 75086-6188
Telephone: 972-526-5015 ~ Fax: 972-526-5014

MICHAEL MCKEE
Resident Bishop

JOELL STANISLAUS
Executive Assistant

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Brothers and sisters in Christ,

With a new school year underway and football leagues at (almost) every level making plans to begin a fall season, many of us are wondering if now is the time to resume in-person worship services or other kinds of ministry gatherings in our Metro District churches.

I have continued to monitor very closely the numbers of new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Texas and Dallas County specifically. As of today, Texas is reporting fewer than 5,000 persons hospitalized with COVID-19 for the first time since June. In Dallas County, new cases have been trending downward since mid-July with an average of about 500 new cases each day.

While these numbers are encouraging, the number of new cases per 100,000 residents remains higher in Dallas County as compared to nearby Denton, Collin and Rockwall Counties; the positivity rate in Texas remains high at 13.5%; Dallas ISD has elected to postpone in-person classes until October; and a very high percentage of the residents in Dallas County are part of groups especially vulnerable to contracting the virus.

Based on all these factors taken together and with a great deal of prayerful discernment, I have decided that United Methodist churches in the Metro District will remain closed for indoor, in-person worship gatherings for the month of September. I understand that many in your congregations are yearning to return to worship in your sanctuaries, but my highest value in this situation is to do no harm and to do our part to safeguard the health and well-being of people in our churches and our communities.

That said, in light of the downward trends noted above, I would recommend that churches begin preparing in earnest to reopen their doors for indoor, in-person worship as early as October. If you haven't already, please assemble a team, make a plan in keeping with [the guidelines from the Texas Department of State Health Services](#), and share your plan with your district superintendent using the attached form.

Many of you also have asked about the possibility of hosting meetings or doing ministry at your churches other than worship. To help you make the wisest decisions for your setting, I want to offer you some best practices that I believe should guide your planning:

- Smaller groups are safer than larger groups;
- Shorter gatherings are safer than longer gatherings;
- Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings;
- Large rooms with good circulation are safer than small rooms; and
- Wearing masks is safer than being unmasked and **must** be required.

My prayers continue to be with you as you navigate these uncharted waters. Thank you for your faithful leadership, and I look forward to being with you virtually at Annual Conference!

Peace –

Michael McKee/js