

## Report of the Healthy Church Team (HCT)

Fairfax United Methodist Church

The HCT met, via Zoom meeting, on June 1, 2020, 7:00pm.

The HCT members represent legal, medical, business, health and human services back grounds, in addition to their own participation in the life of FUMC.

Prior to the meeting, the HCT members received the Virginia Conference Handbook - VCH for reopening and the results of the FUMC reopening survey.

The HCT celebrates and acknowledges FUMC members and friends who express great love and pride for their church. Also, the HCT acknowledges the grief and sadness many are experiencing feeling disconnected from public worship.

Initial assumptions:

1. FUMC has a higher than average COVID19-vulnerable population.
2. The VCH is more restrictive than CDC and Commonwealth of Virginia guidelines.

Discernments and Recommendations:

### Stage 1 – the go first, “Pioneering Churches”, start time is now.

This is the opportunity for churches to open first under the strictest precautions in the VCH; thus, passing lessons learned to other churches. As of the June 1 meeting, no churches on the Alexandria or Arlington Districts have agreed to be a Pioneering Church. *Based on the relatively large membership at FUMC and the nature of the COVID19 pandemic in Northern Virginia, the HCT recommends FUMC not volunteering to participate in Stage 1.*

### Drive-in Worship, start time is now.

This is the opportunity to have a “drive in theater” style worship. Cars would park in the church parking lot and worship would be centralized on a stage area. This initially had appeal with some HCT members; however, the HCT noted a small number indicated on the survey a desire for this option, 18%. Additionally, the VCH puts restrictions on this option that the HCT found to be undesirable. For example, participants cannot use the church restroom. Further, due to the size of the parking lot, any adequate amplification would probably be in violation of the local noise ordinances. Furthermore, FM broad casting systems, so worshipers can listen over car radios, are expensive and difficult to locate for purchase. *Considering all, HCT does not recommend this option.*

### Stage 2 – Limited in person worship as defined by the VCH, start June 21.

There was a clear desire during the HCT discussion to make this a viable option. Again, HCT is highly aware of our members’ love of regular worship at FUMC. However, the conclusion of the HCT was the VCH restrictions and protocols are too onerous. That was the operative word, “onerous.” Please read the VCH for a long list of these related to limited public worship. The HCT also had concerns about the required health forms and the collecting and storing of private health information as a non H.I.P.P.A organization.

Additionally, there is the issue of enforcement. For example, if someone arrives at church with no mask, or removes their mask for any reason, then the service would need to end. If someone arrives willfully wearing no mask and refuses to put on one, *“then the church will have to take all necessary measures to protect the other church goers regardless of whether the disobedient individual feels ill or is exhibiting any symptoms.”* (page 40 Q & A) The HCT cannot recommend WHO the “enforcer” should be in a fellowship culture such as a church.

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The Bishop and the Virginia Annual Conference leaders have taken a no-yielding stance on these precautions during limited in person worship: *“To be very clear, the Conference is requiring a number of rules and protocols in the various stages. These are not recommendations and these are not optional. The Bishop is ordering that the rules and protocols be implemented consistently no matter the size of the church. There are no exceptions to these rules and requirements. For instance, if a church does not follow the rules and requirements, in-person worship will be stopped at that location.”* (Page 3, VCH)

Also, HCT discerned Stage 2 has a feel of exclusiveness. With our current demographics, many, perhaps a large majority (e.g. parents with youth children and those who travel out of state), would be excluded.

*Therefore, HCT does not recommend Stage 2.*

### Stage 3 - Opening under a new normal, start time TBT

***Considering the options given in the VCH, caution expressed in the survey, and in consideration of FUMC’s demographics, the HCT recommends Stage 3.***

Further Recommendations:

- HCT will reconvene again in 30 days to consider peer reviews, and other new information, to learn from any Stage 2 churches, assuming this stage has been activated. Also, there is conversation among some Virginia churches to lobby the Bishop/ Virginia Conference to modify the VCH for a “2.5” version, reopening under less onerous restrictions.
- The HCT recommends continued, enhanced, and expanded use of video connection with the FUMC congregation.
- The HCT further recommends outdoor social gatherings and events, with reasonable precautions, to keep the church connected through the summer as we await clearance for Stage 3. Very little in the VCH is related to outdoor activities versus indoors.

Area United Methodist Church peer comparisons:

Burke UMC	Targeting Sunday after Labor Day.
Annandale UMC	Targeting with the opening of FCPS
Centerville UMC	Undecided but strongly trending Stage 3
St. Matthew’s UMC	Undecided by strongly trending Stage 3

### The FUMC Healthy Church Team

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Approved by the Church Leadership Team, June 8, 2020.