



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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**September 20, 2021**

Siblings in Christ,

We greet you in the name and with the love of Jesus Christ.

As your bishops we want to thank you for all that you have done to ensure the safety of everyone who comes into a United Methodist building during this season of COVID-19. We acknowledge that this has been a very challenging season. We all are grieving the loss of a way of life. Some are grieving the loss of loved ones. We have all felt the economic impact of the virus. And some of us have had contentious conversations about safety protocols, including vaccinations. We are praying for your strength, health, and wisdom during this time.

We are grateful for your continued efforts to do everything possible to keep everyone who comes into a United Methodist building safe. And we encourage you to continue to work with your safety/protocol teams to stay vigilant in your efforts. In the words of the gospel song, “The storm is passing over”, however, the storm has not yet passed. And as disciples, we have an obligation to do all that we can to keep those in our community safe until it does.

As of September 7, 2021, Governor Wolf mandated that all persons over 2 years old wear masks inside K-12 schools and early learning and childcare centers, irrespective of vaccination status. Therefore, if you have a school or daycare in your building, everyone who enters your building must be masked unless they have a medical condition that exempts them.

In light of the recent rise in COVID rates (see most recent Pennsylvania COVID rates, which can be sorted by county or zip code, at [www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Cases.aspx](http://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Cases.aspx)), particularly among children, we strongly encourage all churches to continue to ask all persons to wear masks and practice social distancing during worship, if they have returned to in-person worship. We also strongly encourage mask wearing for other indoor church gatherings. In addition, we encourage you, wherever possible, to provide virtual options for worship for those who do not yet feel comfortable to return to large indoor gatherings or who have to quarantine at home because they have been exposed to or tested positive for the virus.

If you or your congregation has questions or would like to have a conversation with our advisory team, contact our Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, Doug Hoy ([drc@susumc.org](mailto:drc@susumc.org)).

*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. - Psalm 46:11*

Peace and blessings,  
**Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi**  
**Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball**