

COVID-19: Guidance for Faith Communities & Places of Worship

Actions for Faith leaders;

1. **Protect Your Congregation:** See [Guidance for Faith communities & Places of Worship](#) for actions to protect your communities through improved hygiene and social distancing practices
2. **Give accurate information** – Stay abreast of the latest information from the World Health Organisation and your National Ministries of health and use these sources of information - Prevent misinformation spread and discourage sharing of rumours myths and unvalidated news (“fake news”).
3. **Planning ahead:** whilst your community might not be affected by Coronavirus currently, things are changing rapidly. It is advisable to prepare a [Continuity Plan](#) for your faith community to undertake if and when community transmission is confirmed, and stricter recommendations are brought in regarding social distancing and public gatherings
4. **Connecting and caring for your community:** Ensure care of the vulnerable and elderly, support and care for carers in the community, identify communication channels and ensure support for those not connected via telephone
5. **Provide psychosocial support** to families and wider community
6. **Providing spiritual nurture** in the event of social distancing

Additional Resource and Guidance

- [CoH COVID-19 module](#)
- Prayer and scripture
- Resources for children
- WhatsApp messages: (In development)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Continuity Plan template](#)
- [Psychosocial support for coronavirus](#) (WHO)
- Risk communication and stigma
- Guidance material

Guidance for Faith Communities & Places of Worship

Introduction

Faith communities and places of worship are at the centre of community and have a central role both in guiding their members towards behaviour change, and provision of spiritual and pastoral and practical support to those in need. Your faith communities and faith leaders will continue to have that central role, but it is very important to adapt the way of working to ensure that people are safe and protected, and rapidly adjust their ways of meeting and worship in accordance with the national guidelines and stage of epidemic. In this guidance you will find information that will help you to:

- Develop a plan for continuity at different stages of the epidemic
- Understand behaviours and practices that you can undertake to protect your congregations and those most at risk
- Understand how to provide spiritual and pastoral care and support safely
- Understand the guidelines with respect to self-isolation, home-based care, quarantine and hospitalisation.
- Understand who is at the greatest risk from COVID-19.
- Ensure that faith & pastoral workers teams maintain their presence as agents of spiritual and pastoral care in a way that both themselves and those in need of their help

- Pray for people
- Be present (while still ensuring social distance)
- Be calm
- Be loving

Action # 1: Protecting your staff and congregation:

What actions should Places of Worship take to reduce transmission?

1. Promote **good hygiene and handwashing** at all gatherings, services, communions or prayer/study meetings, especially those handing out books, having any physical contact or administering eucharist
 - Ask those attending services to wash their hands as they come into the place of worship.
 - Provide soap and running water or hand sanitiser dispensers at entrances and ensure there is a good supply of soap or hand gel in cloakrooms and kitchens and any other appropriate areas. If using jugs to pour water, have volunteers with clean hands handle the jugs to prevent cross-contamination of handles. **Wet-wipes** are not effective in killing or removing viruses.
 - [Download and print WHO posters on Handwashing](#) and display in all bathrooms and kitchens: these depict key messages of washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand-sanitiser with minimum 60% alcohol content.
 - Remove all reusable towels for drying of hands and replace with non-touch hand dryers, paper towels or *nothing (air dry)*.
 - Display the public information poster on other hygiene practices: coughing or sneezing into a tissue, **catch it** – sneeze into a tissue; **Bin it** – bin the tissue; **Kill it** – wash your hands; **Do not touch your face** unless you've washed your hands. Distribute accurate information for your country

context on what people should do – or where to call if they develop symptoms.

2. **Adjust spiritual practices** – depending on the stage of the epidemic, we advise reducing the sharing of any cups, bowls, and reduce practices that encourage physical contact.
 - **When to cancel my services and events:** Follow your national MOH on when and if to cancel services and events, provided all the above steps are being observed, you may not be required to cancel.
 - Suspend shared use of a chalice for communion – try other methods such as per-poured disposable cups/paper cones; using a dropper to administer. Do not encourage ‘dipping’ of bread using fingers (intinction). Alternatively, offer **Communion only** of consecrated bread/wafer/host, with the priest alone taking the wine;
 - Suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact during the sharing of the Peace; use other gestures such as ‘prayer hands’, bowing;
 - Suspend physical contact practices during blessing or "laying on of hands".
 - **During Baptist or ordination:** wash their hands before and after touching people, for *each candidate*, if a baby or small child, parents/godparents should hold them; It is preferable for water to be poured on the candidate’s head using a baptismal shell. Use a spoon or similar if using oil;
 - **Suspend** Baptism by Immersion, and foot washing
 - **Discourage** kissing or touching of objects, including crucifixes and images
 - **Discourage use or touching of handrails** during communion.

3. Ensure faith and pastoral workers follow hygiene practices in the preparation of faith activities:
 - Ensure **ministers of the Eucharist wash their hands** before and after distributing communion, distributing books or leaflets etc.
 - **Suspend catering** (teas, coffees etc.) where multiple people touch mugs, utensils and foodstuffs.
 - **Do not undertake pastoral visits** people who are self-isolating until isolation ends. Offer support and prayer over the telephone when you can.
 - **If visiting** people at home, who are not unwell, or in isolation, wash hands before and after giving the sacraments, provide hand sanitisers or soap for pastoral workers where possible.
 - Refrain from passing collection plates around: provide in a central location.
 - Suspend the use of holy water stoups.
 - **Wash vestments** worn in services on the hottest cycle you can without damaging them. Ceremonial items which cannot be easily washed should be stored in a well ventilated and brightly sunlit area, for at least 48 hours before re-use.
 - Ensure **good regular cleaning of surfaces people touch regularly**, including such things as door handles, light switches etc, using a bleach based cleaner, after every service.

4. **If one of your congregation is unwell or diagnosed with coronavirus**
 - Anyone who may have been in contact and who feels unwell and has a cough, high temperature or shortness of breath should contact **health authority or telephone advice line.**
 - **Encourage self-isolation of those with symptoms:** Request **those with a cough, fever or cold symptoms** stay at home and do not attend worship for a 10-day period, encourage online or remote participation where possible. Once community transmission is confirmed, it may be advised that elderly (over 60 years), sick or vulnerable people, and those with immune deficiencies and underlying health risks also avoid communal services.
 - If you become ill, do not carry on working. Seek appropriate HEALTH AUTHORITY advice. If a person

who recently attended a service is diagnosed with Coronavirus (COVID-19), health authorities may need to contact all those in close contact whilst they were infectious. Faith leaders may need to assist this process. The following steps are also advised:

- Some of the congregation may be asked to self-isolate. Advice on self-isolation is given in Annex 1.
- It may be necessary to deep clean the church and/or suspend services for a short period. MOH will advise on this. Reassure people that you are receiving and acting on MOH advice.

Action # 2: Give accurate information

- **Fight stigma and blame:** The most hurtful response to infectious diseases is how people suddenly treat people with suspicion, or differently than before because of an illness, or even a perceived illness. Speak up on behalf of the vulnerable and the excluded, and respond with acceptance and compassion, while applying the health measures needed. Remember that people can also be infectious before they present symptoms, thus quash any blaming that might occur.
- **Be informed Monitor and follow the health guidelines.** The Centres for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and your state health department are monitoring the situation closely. Make sure you are in possession, or know where to find, your local health department guidelines. Follow their guidelines. Stay healthy yourself. Model for others how to show up without panic. Basic and accurate information is widely available, but sometimes when anxiety is high, even looking for the basics becomes especially challenging. Providing it can be part of pastoral care.
- Stay aware of the latest information and guidance on the COVID-19 outbreak by regularly referring to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) main coronavirus website](#) and keep your staff aware of what WV is doing globally programmatically and in your country. Use the WHO website and numbers and information from your National MOH (e.g., of cases, deaths) as your primary COVID-19 source to help staff to avoid spreading rumours.
- **Communicate risk responsibly:** Watch the [WHO Risk Communication Overview 17-minute video](#). Review WHO guidelines on the prevention of transmission of the virus and watch the [short WHO video](#) and “[advice for the public](#)” video on COVID-19. Stay abreast of your national Ministry of Health guidance.
- **Prevent the spread of misinformation/fake news** -talking about myths can inadvertently spread them, better not to give air time to misinformation: give the correct information and messages re regularly. Discourage the spread on non-approved news sources within WhatsApp groups and chats rooms.

Action # 3: Planning Ahead

Whilst your community might not be affected by Coronavirus currently, things are changing rapidly. It is advisable to prepare a [Continuity Plan](#) for your faith community to undertake when community transmission is confirmed, and stricter recommendations are brought in regarding social distancing and public gatherings.

- Develop a [Coronavirus Continuity Plan](#) to ensure continued ministry.

Action # 4: Connecting and caring for your community

Faith communities often carry a huge burden of community-based care for the sick: ensure they are prepared in terms of information; protective equipment and accurate information about the correct approaches for caring for infected persons.

- **Consider who are those most at risk:** Ensure care of the vulnerable and elderly, support and care

for carers in the community, identify communication channels and ensure support for those not connected via telephone.

- **Consider vulnerable children.** This includes those with vulnerable caregivers or compromised immune systems. Ensure child are protected if caregivers are impacted.
- Consider how you can care for your community members who are ill or self-isolating, they should try to avoid visitors, but can receive donations to drop off food. Congregation members might be able to collect essential supplies and medicines. Encourage the congregation to consider needs of the elderly who are isolated from their families, so they have enough food, medicines, water access at home.
- Support and pray for them via telephone, including healing ministry or last rites.
- **Food supplies and donations:** the most vulnerable may struggle to get access to supplies, especially those who cannot work and are in poverty. Consider food-banks, drop-in centres and community support groups.
- **Connecting people - Find ways to make community.** The human desire to be helpful is incredibly strong. Although a crisis may lead some people to withdraw, it can also be a significant opportunity to pull together and support each other. Pastors who convey leadership and imagination can pull people together in organized, caring, and sustainable ways. *If social distancing measures are brought in this could mean gatherings are discouraged, meetings out of doors. Smart phone or videos.*

Action # 5: Provide psychosocial support to families and wider community

- **Caring for the most vulnerable:** This includes people over 60s, those with chronic health issues such as respiratory illnesses, heart conditions and diabetes, and those living with HIV and TB. Old age homes will ask people to stay away to protect the elderly.
- **Caring for the carers:** Balance the wellbeing of staff and volunteers with the need to offer support to the community, particularly the most vulnerable groups. Keep tabs on your staff and volunteers and those caring for others. Encourage them to rest, debrief, talk to others, and take care of their own needs. Tend to your own needs. Lean into your own community for support. Take turns giving care. It is tempting to believe in a crisis that we must give or do everything right now. Self-care is not selfish, and rest is a necessity not a luxury. As this outbreak continues to unfold, take steps to renew your own energy and hope in God.
- **Remain calm and be a non-anxious presence.**¹ Stay calm. Be emotionally present but free from anxiety. This will build trust and provide the right kind of care in any crisis. For us to show up non-anxiously (as caregivers, faith community or staff of a humanitarian organization) means managing our own feelings. We should neither try to flee the situation nor flood it with our own emotions or anxieties. People will borrow our calm and compassion to assist them in reducing their own anxieties. Our compassionate care should be a beacon of light, a Channel of Hope in this time.
- **Provide psychosocial support for children.** Be present with and listen to children. Provide structure, routine and clarity about what is happening around them. Provide information to children in age-appropriate ways that they can understand.
- **Listen in love:** No matter what turn a crisis takes, the most powerful gift we can offer is to listen. People need compassionate listening when they feel overwhelmed with the uncontrollable circumstances of a crisis. Avoid lectures, criticism or judgement. Remember our role is to communicate accurately, and allow people to make their own choices.
- **Help people take the long view.** Remind people that God's loving presence was here before the universe itself, and it will be here long after the universe has passed away. Seeing ourselves as part of

¹ Eileen R. Campbell-Reed <http://christiancentury.org/blog-post/guest-post/10-guidelines-pastoral-care-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

a much larger picture, and in the hands of a loving God, offers hope. We can trust God's loving presence in our lives, even when circumstances threaten to dim our hope. We do not have hope despite our circumstances – we have learned from Paul and others before us that we have hope particularly during our hardest times.

- **Keep values alive.** This does not mean being dishonest about a crisis and its threats. It does mean we keep leaning into God's sustaining presence, loving our neighbours, and facing death with the same purpose and values by which we faced life.
- **Pray.** Spoken prayers for people who are anxious and in great need can reshape a situation's meaning. Yet in times of trauma and crisis, using too many words can sound hollow—and prayers can come off as judgment or preachy advice. We participate in God's life and one another's lives by showing up, by meditating in silence and renewing our sense of purpose, by bearing honest witness to the situation.
- **Considerations in the event of bereavement or death:** if there is community-wide transmission of Coronavirus, there will be deaths, and this will affect your community. Workers and ministers paid and unpaid may be bereaved. Ensuring that the bereaved receive the care they need will be important. [Download WHO guidance on mental health considerations for Coronavirus](#) and **providing psychosocial support.**
- **Providing pastoral care for the sick:** do not visit **Coronavirus infected** patients unless hospital can ensure quarantine protection. If patients do not have access to telephones and have requested a priest, avail your contact details to the members of the hospital staff, so they can facilitate telephone contact if you are called upon to administer last rites or similar. Do not visit if you are unwell. There is no reason you should not visit patients in care home or facilities or they are unwell for other reasons, but ensure you respect facility hygiene guidance, and call ahead. If giving communion, observe spiritual practices guidance given above.

Action # 6 Providing spiritual nurture

- **Be present, even if it's not in person.** Social distancing is a key way of preventing the spread of this epidemic, but as Faith Leaders we can still be present. It is not the same as being able to reach out and hold a hand. Yet we are fortunate to have this viable option. You are likely already connected to people on various social platforms, so use them—with care (rather with sensitivity??) —to offer your support. In World Vision we have CoH WhatsApp groups, Facebook and email contacts. We also have various forms of mobile technology in Health with care givers groups. Utilize these various forms of mobile technology to stay in contact with the groups and ensure that the messaging is true and alleviate fear and prevent stigma.
- **Reduce overcrowding:** If your worship space is prone to overcrowding – offer additional services and limit head count; encourage attendance at different times. Consider the options for providing services outside – there is evidence that outdoor spaces limit the spread of viruses, e.g. for prayer groups and Bible study or Sunday school this could be preferable.
- **Creative & digital outreach:** If wider social distancing measures think about ways to spiritually support your community during a stressful and frightening time – can you use newsletters, email, text messages, community radio or digital outreach methods. If your government advise against community gatherings, so you can consider enable people to **access resources digitally** in the event they are unable to get to church for example:
 - Live stream services
 - Do services over community radio
 - Record prayers and sermons at home via video/voice recording and share via SMS or WhatsApp
 - Here is a [blog which outlines](#) low cost or free ways to livestream a sermon, service, event or prayer.

- **Consider the particular needs of children:** Develop Sunday School lessons. Ensure children and youth can virtually connect with each other or find other means of continuing to engage with their peers.
- For Christian churches : here is a list of [RELEVANT PRAYERS AND SCRIPTURE](#) from the Anglican church

Additional Resource and Guidance²:

- **Channels of Hope COVID-19 module**

A Channels of Hope (CoH) COVID-19 module are *currently field tested* in WVDRC and WVAngola, the module is developed to be an additional module to support any existing F&D training curriculum in the field. Once finalised it will be uploaded in the following box link:
<https://app.box.com/s/q9tcp01b05677p3lqegpqa0s2jl2pax5>

- **Prayer and scripture guidance**

The WVI F&D team developed Devotions for Times of Trial and Challenges with will be shared with all internal staff and faith communities. The organisation also held a Prayer Vigil to ensure that all staff feels connected during this time.



Devotions for Times WV COVID19 Prayer
of Trial and Challenge Vigil Prayers (3.19.20)

- **Resources for Children**

WVI is in the *process of developing various resources* for children. Here is a few resources of external partners which are available:



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- **WhatsApp messages**

The WV F&D team have leveraged their (potentially) 80 000- strong cadre of Faith trainees to spread accurate information and guidance about how to deal with the COVID pandemic. With each successful training, graduate are added to WhatsApp groups. These trained faith leaders can then communicate further with their church members and Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs)

On Saturday 14 March 2020 we have started sending messages focusing on:

- Support for vulnerable populations (the elderly, isolated and those at risk)
- Effective behaviour change communication
- Pastoral care for those affected by the pandemic

² <https://app.box.com/s/q9tcp01b05677p3lqegpqa0s2jl2pax5>

- COVID-19 specifically to these groups.
- Scripture based response

Here is also a link to external resources available.



Prayer Apps.pdf

- **COVID-19 Continuity Plan Template**

This is currently *under development*

Additional resources for planning can be find at:

- <https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Coronavirus-Church-Planning-Template.pdf>

- **Psychosocial support for coronavirus (WHO)**

WHO have a training module for providing psychosocial support to children and adolescents. This can be find at: https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/psychosocial_support/en/



psychosocial_supp
ort.pdf

- **Risk communication and stigma**

This is currently *under development*

- **Guidance material**

Additional Guidance material available for WVI and partners:

- Rapid guidance for prevention and containment (World vision Staff)



COVID-19 RApid
Guidelines for Preven

WHO. Key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak (Interim Guidance)

For consideration for nutrition programmes conducting mass gatherings (e.g. during distributions organised by supplementary feeding programmes) <https://web-prod.who.int/publications-detail/key-planning-recommendations-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-the-current-covid-19-outbreak>

UNICEF. COVID-19: What Parents Should Know. (Accessed 13 March 2020) General information for parents, including precautions families can take to avoid infection and guidance for symptomatic women who are breastfeeding, including recommended precautions to prevent transmission to an infant. www.unicef.org/stories/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-what-parents-should-know

WHO. Home care for patients with suspected COVID-19 infection presenting with mild symptoms and management of contacts. (Published 4 February 2020) Version 1 - 13 March 2020
[www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts](http://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts)

Public Health England: [Stay at home: guidance for people with confirmed or possible coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#)

WHO. Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19. (Published 3 March 2020)

Describes precautions to take to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, including during meetings. www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf

WHO Child Friendly Resources: Brainpop Coronavirus video for children in English; Child-Friendly Comic Strip; Children's Fairytale Story: The Flying Scientist

WHO Novel Coronavirus Information Landing Page: Information and guidance from WHO, including sitreps, technical guidance and training. www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

UNICEF A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma: https://www.epiwin.com/sites/epiwin/files/content/attachments/2020-02-4/COVID19%20Stigma%20Guide%2024022020_1.pdf

Poster visuals:



Hand_Hygiene_When_How_To_HandWash_How_To_HandRub_Poster.pdf



Poster.pdf



Poster.pdf

References:

Article by Eileen R. Campbell-Reed in <http://christiancentury.org/blog-post/guest-post/10-guidelines-pastoral-care-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for churches: Church of England:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na>

[WVI Faith and Development Pray Vigil Prayers 19032020](#)