

COVID-19 - Guidance for the local church.

Introduction: Covid-19 poses many questions for churches around the world. Provided here is guidance on two main things:

1. Mitigation measures for gathering together.
2. Role of the local Church in responding to the pandemic.

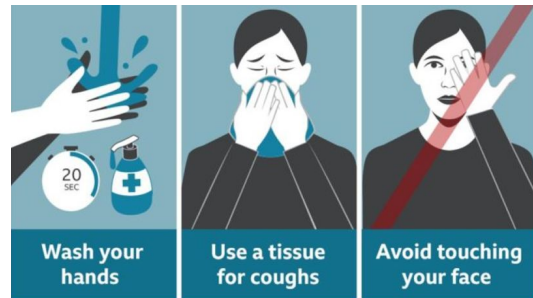
Please read in conjunction with [this document](#) and follow guidance from your own governments.

PART ONE: Mitigation Measures for Mass Gatherings

Transmission: Coronavirus is spread by people in close contact (less than 2 metres) of one another as droplets are passed mainly in coughs and sneezes. It is also passed through physical contact as people touch infected things or one another with unwashed hands. The ways to prevent transmission are as follows:

A. Hygiene Measures: The following hygiene measures can help prevent transmission:

1. Regularly wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used if soap and water are not available.
2. Catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and then safely dispose of the tissue immediately. If no tissue is available, catch in the crook of your arm; your elbow.
3. Avoid touching your face.
4. Regularly clean and sanitise the church facilities and equipment, especially areas frequently touched, including surfaces, handles, lecterns and microphones



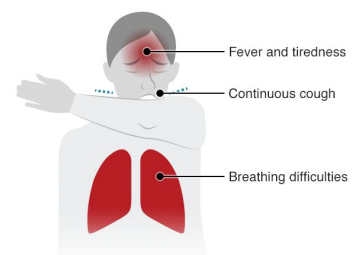
These simple measures should be promoted amongst all members and facilitated when you meet together. E.g. providing handwashing stations at the entrance.

B. Self Isolation: Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend gatherings and should remain at home and seek medical advice.

Symptoms include:

- Fever and tiredness
- Continuous, new cough
- Breathing difficulties

Coronavirus: Key symptoms



C. Social distancing: While the church is called not to abandon the call to worship and fellowship, it also has a moral obligation to protect others by limiting the spread of the disease. Depending upon the local situation and taking into consideration the directives of local and national authorities, churches need to consider how to hold or adjust worship services, prayer meetings and fellowships. Factors to consider regarding gathering together include:

- Maintaining a distance of 2 meters (six feet from others), may limit the spread of the virus.
- The risk of spread is increased in closed, confined spaces compared to open air.
- Limiting physical contact reduces risk of transmission. E.g. avoid shaking hands, hugs, kisses
- Avoid sharing communal items such as cups, plates and offertory plates/baskets.

PART TWO: What the Church can and should do

1. Promote correct and clear messages.



Churches and church leaders in particular have the opportunity to communicate and influence the community. Providing clear and simple messages about COVID-19 that are based on science is really important. See PART ONE for simple messages to deliver.

2. Counter false and harmful messaging to resist panic and prevent stigma.



Due to fear or ignorance many wrong messages are being spread leading to false condemnation and stigma of some groups or people with the virus. Faith leaders should listen to the community and other information sources to discover what harmful messages are passing around and ensure that they speak out and correct them. Misinformation can cause isolation, damage and death. This is an opportunity to calm fears and promote positive attitudes and behaviours.

3. Provide an example of safe behaviours.



Church leaders in particular should model behaviours that have the potential to save lives and prevent transmission. They should lead by example washing hands regularly, following guidance on social distancing greetings and gatherings etc. Modelling positive attitudes and care towards others during this challenging time is very important.

4. Care for the congregation (also see mitigation measures in PART ONE)



Church members may be isolated, worried and fearful. Not all of them may have had access to the correct information. They will miss a central part of church life which is gathering together for fellowship, prayer, worship and sharing bread and wine. Prepare church members for a time of practising social distancing and maybe even isolation and proactively find ways for members to stay connected and provide spiritual support to one another. Help families grow their own spiritual life of prayer and Bible reading.

5. Care for the community, especially the most vulnerable.



The Church does not exist for itself but to love God and to love the Neighbour. Christians should model Jesus during this time through word and action, speaking about and living lives of hope, love and neighbour-care that counter despair, fear and self-serving. Those least at risk (young¹ and healthy) are best placed to serve in the following ways:

- Promote sharing of information (put up posters) and hand-washing possibilities in the community;
- Check on vulnerable and isolated people; that they have enough food and other basic needs;
- Respond to loneliness and fear e.g. set up a prayer support group, using the phone or online if possible

6. Help church members think biblically about our attitudes and response to the virus.



At times like this we need to ensure that our theology calls us to speak and act with love. The Bible does not allow us to create a direct link between an individual's sin and disasters that happen in the world, including COVID-19, so we cannot blame or stigmatise those who contract it. But it does teach that we live in a fallen world of broken relationships where suffering and sickness are part of our reality. We have Emmanuel, God with us, who understands our suffering, accompanies us through it and asks us to bring our fears and worries to Him in prayer (1 Peter 5:7). Alongside this, we recognise that suffering and sickness is not what God has intended for his creation, and the Christian's role during this testing time is to act to bring healing to a broken world and its people, revealing God's love and glory. We want people to experience Jesus' promise of fullness of life (Jn 10:10) and we do this by responding to people's physical needs in all areas of life: physical, spiritual and emotional.

7. Intercede before God for an end to Covid-19



The Church has been given the full armour of God to respond to the brokenness of this world as we know that our battles are not actually physical but against the powers of this dark world and the

¹ Young people too can get coronavirus but they have a better ability to recover well.

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:10-20). Therefore prayer is important at this time. Jesus understands our fears and worries and asks us to bring them to Him in prayer (1 Peter 5:7).

Resources for Church Action Planning:

If you as a Church are keen on developing a church based action plan please refer to and adapt the following template to suit your community and context:

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

Specific Church Resources:

<https://coronavirusthechurch.com/#resources>

<https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/churches-and-the-coronavirus>

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/568780/Coronavirus_advice_for.aspx

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/the-methodist-church-coronavirus-guidance-and-resources/>

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/stop-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-church?mc_cid=7b1a125d85&mc_eid=6f058533f4

<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/press-resources/press-releases/2020-press-releases/responding-to-covid-19/>

<https://www.ucc.org/news/church-leaders-urge-education-caution-and-common-sense-as-u-s-coronavirus-cases-increase-02282020>

A Coronavirus Prayer (Kerry Weber):

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. Jesus Christ, heal us.

Longer contemplative prayer

<https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/pdf/Prayers/cv%20prayer%20slides.pdf>