

Guidance for Churches in the Coronavirus Era

This document (SOP) is offered as a resource to the Church



Authors and Contributors

This document is offered as guidance and made freely available to all churches, Christian organisations and individuals. Note that persons who contributed to this guide did so in their individual capacity and not as part of any organisation they belong to or represent.

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Citation: Amar-Singh HSS, Lim Swee-Im, Matthew Ling Ung-Hiing, Alex Tang Tuck-Hon, Low Chai-Hok, David Bok. 2020. Guidance for Churches in the Coronavirus Era. Malaysia. Version 1, 2nd May 2020. Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 4.0

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge kind suggestions by Rev Andy Chi, Secretary General, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia. Dr Lilian Koh offered valuable ideas on spiritual formation. An online discussion with a large Sarawak pastors/leaders group offered ground realities.

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Guidance for Churches in the Coronavirus Era

Ecclesia Semper Reformanda (the church is always experiencing the process of reformation)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted all of society including the church. Most of us are struggling with many different emotions and uncertainties. We have a deep sense of loss of the present realities we had taken for granted and the future hopes we have dreamed of. This is especially true of younger persons and those in training. Uncertainty about the future frustrates us. We are going through a collective period of grief, fears and anxieties as individuals, communities, a nation and a world united by the destruction caused by the virus. Jeremiah who also lived through terrible times wrote "*because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassion never fails. They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness*" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Because of God's compassion, there is hope beyond COVID-19. Amidst this sense of loss and uncertainty about the future we need to ask the right questions. Only then can we prepare for the answers.

This document hopes to:

1. Ask important and relevant questions about the future.
2. Look at this pandemic from a spiritual perspective.
3. Offer practical guidance for the church and individuals on how to move forward and support their congregation and community.

The Expected Immediate Future with the COVID-19 Pandemic

No one can be certain what will happen in the next 1 to 2 years but unless there is divine intervention, the following is likely to happen:

1. The lockdown or movement control order (MCO) is being gradually relaxed currently.
2. However all mass gatherings and conferences will be discouraged for 6-9 months. This will include religious meetings and travel for religious and other holidays.
3. Schools will not be opened immediately but in stages. Child care services have now been allowed.
4. What has been achieved with a 'lockdown' is to push/defer the epidemic to a further date, so as to give us time to take action, prepare, change our behaviour & way of living.
5. There is low grade community spread of COVID-19 still on-going, usually by asymptomatic individuals. Currently perhaps 0.2-0.3% of all Malaysians are infected with the virus but are unaware.
6. It is expected that COVID-19 cases will rebound with episodic epidemics and we will have to control each 'wave' until it gradually fades over time. The second wave may be even bigger than the first one if we let down our guard.
7. We are just starting out with the COVID-19 pandemic and is estimated to be around for at least another 1 to 2 years, provided safe vaccine is developed, produced and made widely available in the next 18-24 months. Otherwise it may last longer.

The view point expressed above may be optimistic and the crisis may carry on for a longer period.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Challenge and Opportunity

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a serious challenge to all of us, even a threat to life and causing economic hardship, it however is also an opportunity. The pandemic offers us an opportunity to reflect deeply on our lives, the church, our community and the direction we have been pursuing. It strips away unnecessary things and offers an opportunity to all of us to let go of what distracts us from Christ. It offers an invitation from God to a deeper interior life, to grow and deepen our individual relationship with Him. We must not miss out on or underestimate the work of God in our lives at this time. What the COVID-19 pandemic limits in human contact and closeness, God opens a door for the exact opposite with Him - closeness, intimacy, companionship.

As we use this opportunity for transformation by God, it is important that it is not just for the COVID-19 pandemic period but to last beyond it. We must guard from slipping back to 'business as usual' once the threat is passed. In the medical field we have a phrase called 'in-status-quo' (ISQ). This is used whenever an in-patient is 'existing', on a flat plateau clinically, stable but not changing from day to day. This is a not a good place to be for anyone spiritually but is a not uncommon state for many. While many may have come to realise and experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ, not all have moved into an ever deepening continual journey and relationship with the Lord. We need to deepen and broaden our individual relationship with God not just as Saviour and Father but also as Friend and Beloved.

The church of God is never static but always dynamic as she is moved by the Holy Spirit. Community and the communion of believers is much more than meetings or a physical building. The Church is the people, the body of Christ and not the building. We need to continually focus on the needs of the people and not the organisation.

We do not know where this pandemic has come from and would be reluctant to call it an act of God. More likely than not, this pandemic is due to man's long standing actions of continual global destruction of the earth. However we can still use this crisis to enable individual transformation and a reformation of the church and our community.

The pandemic has created many difficulties, but there have also been some blessings: Decreasing crime, global warming slowing down, rivers becoming clean, animals and birds coming out more, and nature restoring itself.

We need to remember that the pandemic does not change who we are. We are the children of God, the light and salt of the world and need to grow even deeper into this reality.

The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but he most certainly permitted it.
And therefore, even though it were an attack of the enemy,
by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord's permission, and therefore all is well.
He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good."

CH Welch

Changing Ministry Environments & the Response of the Church

This section covers a discussion on important questions and issues as we grapple with the 'new normal' for the church and body of Christ.

The key principles to live by are to behave and act as though:

1. Everyone around us is COVID-19 positive and we want to prevent the infection from reaching us.
2. That we have an asymptomatic infection of COVID-19 and do not want to infect others.
3. That every older person we see is our mother or father and every person with a chronic illness is our sister or brother, and we do not want to pass the virus to them.

We need the cooperation, responsibility and behaviour change of the vast majority of the congregation (and public) for effective control. Much will depend on maturity of the public. We must not be lulled into complacency by the decreasing numbers.

We must be aware that we will need to develop 'new ministry environments' in the face of the potential to spread the virus. Some examples of limitations/restrictions will include:

1. No exchange of speakers/preachers between churches.
2. Re-evaluating home and hospital visitation services.
3. Regular visits to rural churches for ministry and support will have to be re-evaluated.
4. Restriction will possibly be placed by the authorities, once MCO is relaxed further, on the maximal size of any congregation meeting - 50? or 100 or 200? This will have serious implications for larger churches and require, not just a fragmentation of services, but possibly the birth of many smaller churches.
5. All short term mission trips will also need to be halted in the immediate future.

Few of us are able to recognise that many of our current church systems and structures are traditions grown over years. What started as good ideas and a response to needs, became traditions and later fixed structures. We are so used to them that any deviation may appear as 'non-church' or even 'heretical'. We should be careful not to become dependent on our church systems but rather on the living God.

Heidi Campbell recently edited the 'The Distanced Church' which collates opinions from a vast number of church leaders and pastors in this crisis. She describes three strategies churches have used to deal with the disruption caused by the lockdown. The commonest was the 'transferring strategy' which involved moving the standard offline worship services to an online one using live streaming or by pre-recorded video. This meant the congregation were passive observers in their own homes of the 'performance' by the priest/pastor. The second was a 'translating strategy' which blended the 'performance' with some congregational interaction and participation using online meeting applications. The third was a 'transforming strategy' where pastors moved away from the conventional structure to offer an authentic and personalised conversation and dialogue via a 'fireside chat model' and real time communication via social media or texts during and after the broadcast service.

One 'blessing' of this pandemic is that it has driven the church out of bricks and mortar buildings into gatherings of faith communities. We are just discovering the benefits of virtual faith communities and are beginning to realise that whether 'real' (as in flesh and blood) or 'virtual' (as in digital) we are communities. Virtual communities are just the digital extension of our real communities because we as the body of Christ belong to each other.

A. Remaining the Body of our Lord

Question: How can we continue to be the body of Christ, and continue with congregational activities when we are separated by the coronavirus?

This question is the primary one in the hearts and minds of many leaders and members of the congregation. How do we meet together for worship? How do we meet together for prayer? How do we have fellowship when many of the mechanisms we use in the past are now fraught with danger? There is concern that the pandemic will make some members of the congregation fall away and lose their faith.

As we develop mechanisms to enable fellowship and keep the unity of the body, we must take special consideration to protect our vulnerable and senior members. This includes children and adults with chronic disease and those 60 years and older.

There are a number of options for maintaining a 'church-life' and each church will have to weigh the options and possibilities for their location and resources. It might mean that mixtures of options are used. It may also be true that once this threat has passed some of the 'new' ways of meeting and fellowship may be maintained and even grown. Some suggestions include:

1. Establish an Effective Digital Church

Many churches have been slow in adopting digital platforms to enable fellowship, worship, prayer and keeping the body together. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many churches to rapidly embrace digital technology to keep the congregation together. However they have not moved beyond the initial technology to develop more sophisticated and effective platforms. Many were hoping that this crisis will pass quickly and we can revert to our previous forms of meetings.

There may be concern with some leaders that the wide-spread use of digital platforms by churches would enable some church members to easily slip-over to other congregations or attend multiple churches online. We must however recognise that the digital church is here to stay and perhaps one of the frontiers for the church to actively pursue. Churches that do not embark on this may find that they are not able to attract younger individuals to join their congregations. Having a digital church is no less real than having a physical one; both have their challenges.

Digital services need to be authentic and not just "watching another show". While qualities of digital services are important, personalised services are even more important. Avoid one church streaming to all smaller churches; it removes the pastoral care and connection of the local church. Enable a platform that ministers to people, connects with them and others, and offers interaction. In any body it is the relationships that count and hold us together and this must be the focus of any digital church activity. Jesus is still the focus and empowerer of any service and activity in the church whether physical or digital.

Our content is important, but our connection is imperative.
We must intentionally create spaces where deep friendship can blossom.

Zach Lambert

Some practical points to consider in establishing a digital church:

- a. Remember that online is not just live-streaming (or recorded) video, social media groups or video chats but is also audio. All types of digital tools should be explored to find the ones that best suit the congregation. Multiple tools may be needed to meet the needs of different members of the congregation. Audio services may be more suited to the busy homemaker or persons from an older generation.
- b. We must be reminded that whether live streaming or recorded, this is a worship service where all participate in the Presence of God and not a performance by a few key actors. This is especially relevant as the congregation who watch the worship service also derive their entertainment (movies, games, social interactions) out of the same devices.
- c. It is important to harness the capability and know-how of the technology-savvy, younger members of the congregation to get a digital church up and running and maintain it. There will be a need to hire such individuals on a full-time basis rather than just depend on volunteers. However this is also a good opportunity to get the younger members who are digital natives and digital citizens to play a greater role in the church.
- d. The vast majority will use their hand phones to connect to any digital service. Some will use their laptops/chromebooks and a few their smart TVs. Less digitally capable members of the congregation will need support to configure their digital devices to enable them to participate. Data plan and bandwidth will be of concern to the rural and indigenous churches in the interior.
- e. There should be mechanisms for the congregation to comment and respond to the speaker/pastor as well as to each other.
- f. Keep the message and content appropriate and meaningful to the audience. Feedback to gauge response and ask for areas to cover is useful. Preaching online is different from preaching offline so preachers may need some advice on online preaching.
- g. A mixture of electronic and physical meetings should also be considered, as it will allow for safe physical distancing. For example we could have an outdoor meeting which is shared on a large screen or streamed to individual devices.
- h. Small groups community sessions can be held via group video chats, augmented by short messaging applications.
- i. Considerations should be made for people who are unable to attend church such as the elderly, bedridden, handicapped, immune compromised persons, the sick. In the past, the needs of these individuals have been inadequately met when they cannot attend the physical church service. As we rethink church, these people should be included.
- j. Of concern is how to ensure participation and attendance? It is important to point out that a digital church can allow a greater degree of participation than a physical church service does. The current physical church service leaves little option to ask questions, make comments or clarify issues. A digital service allows for easy questions and answers session and should perhaps be incorporated in existing physical church services when they return.
- k. Some suggestions from the “The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online” (see reference) :
 - a. An online ‘Coffee Shop’ for people to drop by to chat.
 - b. A ‘Friday Night’ music slot to connect and have some fun.
 - c. ‘Fire-side Chats’ by the pastor to the congregation that authentically meet pastoral need (can also be done by other church members in rotation).
 - d. Use part of the online time at services to give the congregation a chance to connect and share messages to each other.

“...most of the churches who are online now are experiencing growth.....
To put digital church back on the shelf in the new normal
is to ignore the greatest opportunity the church today has to reach people.”

Carey Nieuwhof

There will be a need to develop a 'how-to template' for churches that have never attempted to move their services online. Some useful sites to get us started are listed here:

- i. Ryan Wakefield. The Ultimate Coronavirus Guide For Churches - How to quickly ramp up your digital ministry, digital services, and digital giving. Church Marketing University. Available here: <https://churchmarketinguniversity.com/the-ultimate-coronavirus-guide-for-churches/>
- ii. Victor Bous. How to begin streaming live church services. Available here: <https://restream.io/blog/how-to-begin-streaming-live-church-services/>
- iii. How To Create A Digital Church For Those Who Can't Attend. ReachRight. Available here: <https://reachrightstudios.com/create-a-digital-church/>
- iv. Heidi A Campbell (Editor). The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online. 2020 BY-NC-SA. Available here: <https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/187891>

Not all churches can move to a digital environment. Rural and poor communities may find this challenging due to limitation/access to devices, availability of a stable and good broadband/Wi-Fi service and payment for broadband services. See an option under "Supporting Smaller Churches" below.

Besides a return to conventional or digital services, one alternative for the church to consider is going 'organic' i.e. a return to the house churches concept. This will require a decentralisation of all tasks - leading the discussion of the word, worship, prayer, etc. Leadership could be by the heads of families or most competent member of the household. As MCO is partially relaxed this could be enlarged to a few families (provided the same families meet each time and not move around). The church would be responsible to offer guidance and produce weekly material like bible discussion guides, scripture reading, etc. House church leaders would meet online periodically for briefing and guidance by the central church leadership. Collection of offerings and communion could be conducted at house church level.

2. Changing Our Coming Together: Adjusting Physical Services to make them Safer to Attend

See Appendix C that offers a checklist to use for urban churches (cities & towns).

As the lockdown (MCO) is relaxed in stages and churches allowed to meet, there will be a slow re-establishment of some services. We must be very careful this time not to re-introduce all the activities that we were previously conducting. It is recommended that for the first 2-4 weeks after the MCO is lifted that the church not return to any services but take the time to finalise their plans (see below) which should be written now. It would be good if one person can take a video or still images of various parts of the church building/premises to enable the church team and board to plan a more effective strategy.

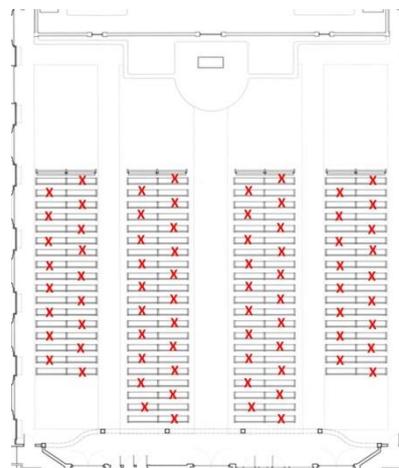
Some suggestions for re-establishing services safely include:

a. Size and Frequency of Services

Smaller, more frequent services will have to become normative as we want to space out the congregation. There is no optimal size for safety. Consider decreasing main services to 30% of previous attendance (i.e. conduct 3 services). The group that come for each specific service should be the same group that comes for each subsequent Sunday service to avoid mixing with other groups. Much larger churches may consider having even more services spread throughout the week. It is important to note that multiple services in the same premises can only be held if sufficient time is allocated to ventilate and clean the environment and chairs between services.

b. Safe Physical Distancing

At all times we should aim to separate families by at least 1-2 meters when seated. Place all chairs at a minimum of 1 meter apart, 2 metres is preferable. Families may be seated together. Have markers on the floor to indicate chair locations. If chairs are fixed or joined then indicate which chairs can be used and cross out the ones that cannot - place people diagonally for further safe physical distancing – see the figure. The current seating arrangement in many churches, everyone facing the front, has no scriptural basis and may encourage recipients rather than a congregation actively involved. The presence of God is not at the front of the sanctuary but in our hearts. We could use this crisis to relook at our seating structures and change ‘congregational geography’. Some older spiritual groups sit facing each other.



c. Air-conditioning Will be a Problem

It is well recognised that air-conditioners re-circulate air and also create a draft that may spread droplets within a building. It would be preferable to turn off air-conditioning, ventilate the building (open windows) or have more open air meetings. This may not be feasible for some structures and some locations and pre-cooling the room prior to the service may be an option. Open air services and very early morning services should also be considered. Some churches have experimented with services in outdoor parking lots with parishioners seated in their cars (air-conditioning off, windows down).

d. Is Singing Permissible During Worship?

It is well recognised that forceful talking as well as singing spreads droplets wider than 1-2 meters, perhaps up to 4 metres. Singing with masks on is also difficult. Hence we need to reconsider singing as part of the worship service. One option is to hum the songs in unison. Worship is more than just singing, it is primarily an attitude of the heart towards God. Perhaps less singing and more reflecting on what we just sang may make it less of a Christian ritual. Perhaps we could engage in silent, contemplative worship with God collectively or led by a single person.

e. How can we Enhance Protection for our Vulnerable and Senior Members?

We will need to put in place priority services for our vulnerable and senior members. Some churches might be able to offer them separate seating behind a glass enclosure. Others may opt to participate from home. Each church should maintain a list of vulnerable members (aged 60 years and above and those with chronic health problems) to support the prevention activities. These individuals should be contacted by phone to check about their preferences for church services. One option is to hold a service that caters only for older persons.

f. Options to also be Involved from Home

Even when we re-establish physical services there will be a need to maintain online services. It must be an option for those who choose to remain at home or feel too vulnerable to participate online. Hence we will need to maintain both digital and physical church services simultaneously.

g. Recorded or Live-stream Sermons

If we have multiple smaller services on the same day it may be fatiguing for the pastor to deliver the same sermon three times. Hence it could be delivered once to the congregation present (and live-streamed those at home) and then the recorded version played for the subsequent services. Services and sermons must be kept brief/short. If the pulpit is close to the congregation then consider a plastic shield between the pastor and the audience (or wear a face shield when speaking).

h. Change the Offering/Giving to Electronic Gifts

Collecting physical notes as an offertory is to be phased out. Notes pose a transmission risk. Encourage the congregation to plan their giving and give it electronically. For those who would like to give weekly at the service (direct gifts), offer physical QR codes that can be scanned by their hand phone to make the offering. There will be a need to explore and identify the best, safe platform for digital money transfer for common use (there are Christian-based online giving platforms that have been developed). Support individuals will be required in each church to help those less digitally capable to set up online giving.

i. Communion

As a whole delivery of communion to a congregation in the face of COVID-19 is not easy and poses transmission risks. Consider initially not having communion until other safety practices are well established. When re-introducing communion, consider making it infrequent initially. Churches that share a communion cup should stop the practice and move to individual cups. Perhaps the communion style of believers from other denominations (e.g. Catholics) should be explored to find the safest option. Consider the use of communion packs (prepacked bread and cup).

3. Guide for Sunday Schools - See separate guidance written for child care centres COVID-19 safety that will apply for Sunday School available in 4 languages here:
<http://www.necicmalaysia.org/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=6&action=view&retrieveid=118>

Although many churches have established Sunday School for children, it should be recognised that it has always been God's intention for parents to bring up their children in the way of the Lord, not to delegate it to the church. Parenting your child spiritually is not easy and many are content to let the church take the major responsibility. While there is a place for children of families who have yet to know Christ to find Him via the Sunday School, Christian parents should use the opportunity given by this crisis to re-establish their spiritual role in the upbringing of their own children. The church should play a role in offering resources to aid this undertaking and support parents.

4. Key Prevention Safety Measures to Implement
- a. Conduct training of all staff (including cleaners and security) and the congregation on COVID-19 safety and prevention issues. Plan re-training on a regular basis (bi-weekly initially then monthly). Have written guidelines that are prominently displayed for staff at key locations.
 - b. Focus training on: safe physical distancing, avoid touching faces, mask wearing, prevent crowding when in church, limit physical contact and talking, keep hands clean at all times, keep surfaces clean at all times.
 - c. For the immediate future all members of the congregation and staff should wear masks on arrival at the church, while in the building and until they leave.
 - d. Perform temperature screening at the entrance for everyone. Use non-contact thermometers (temperature scans). Any person with a temperature of 37.5°C and above should be asked to rest at home and not enter the church.
 - e. Make available alcohol-based hand sanitisers to the congregation on entry to the church and on departing.
 - f. The congregation and church staff should be reminded not to socialise in groups and avoid mingling in the corridor or common spaces on arrival or leaving. Encourage everyone not to talk unless necessary.
 - g. Avoid any meals at the church premises for the congregation.
 - h. Handshakes, hugging and other demonstrations of physical contact are to be discouraged.
 - i. Toilets are a risk location for transmission of coronavirus. Encourage the congregation to use their own home toilets before coming to limit/reduce the use at the church. Advise staff and the congregation to close the toilet seat cover after using and before flushing the toilet, to reduce waste aerosol transmission. Consider replacing all tap-heads in public toilets with elbow-operated heads (or sensor based taps) to reduce infection risk via tap use. Make available adequate liquid soap in all public toilets. Foot-operated soap dispensers would be ideal. Hot air dispensing hand dryers (blowers) are not recommended to be used as they are well recognized to spread organisms.
 - j. The congregation and staff should be discouraged from wearing gloves, as this gives a false sense of security. With gloves on they may touch many surfaces, becoming a risk to others. Gloves should only be used for cleaning activities.
 - k. Make available foot-operated bins with covers at the entrance/exit of the church and toilets.
 - l. Once travel restrictions are lifted advise all members of the congregation and staff who travel overseas to avoid visiting the church for 14 days. Give all staff who have just returned from overseas mandatory, paid 14-day leave of absence to enable quarantine.
 - m. If you have a COVID-19 emergency or need advice call the State Crisis Preparedness and Response Centres (CPRCs) of Local or National Ministry of Health Officers. See Appendix A below for contact numbers.

5. Cleaning Routines

- a. Make available alcohol-based hand sanitisers for all staff at their work places and adequate liquid soap in all staff wash & rest rooms.
- b. Disposable gloves and plastic bags need to be made available for emergency use to clean up body fluid spills.
- c. Church floors should be cleaned before any service and at least at the end of the work day.
- d. For a list of effective disinfecting solutions against coronavirus for cleaning the church premises see Appendix B below.
- e. Clean chairs used by the congregation between services. Invest in plastic chairs that can easily be disinfected after use by each person.
- f. Remove all 'unnecessary items' from the church common areas to avoid having to clean them or contaminate them (including reading materials, and other communally-used objects). Keep items pinned on soft boards to a bare minimum of essential health messages.

6. Staff Office, Meetings and Training

- a. Staff offices should consider flexible workplaces and working from home or remotely. Each church should seriously explore if staff can work from home every day or part-time.
- b. Offices should be restructured to offer 1-2 meter space between those working there. It would be best to have transparent screens put up between work spaces. However note that the air-conditioning re-circulates and poses a risk.
- c. Think about how staff and visitors move and interact in your church office, especially at common spaces like the pantry, toilets, computer room, library, resource room, etc.
- d. Conduct regular monitoring and routine staff health checks. Perform daily verbal health assessments (any respiratory symptoms) and temperature screening for all staff at arrival to work and when leaving work. Use non-contact thermometers (temperature scans). Staff who are unwell (i.e. fever or acute respiratory symptom like cough or running nose) should be encouraged to stay at home and inform their respective supervisor/church administrator.
- e. Reduce face-to-face meetings, especially non-essential ones. Conduct meetings via teleconferencing and over emails instead.
- f. Choose online training whenever possible. For essential training that cannot be conducted online, space out seating for participants at least 1 meter apart. Provide individually packed food instead of buffet-style meals.
See this document for ideas how to restructure the office: [Are You And Your Office Ready To Get Back Post-MCO?](#)
- g. A Checklist for Restructuring the Office Environment is available in the appendix (see Appendix E).

Some of these changes mentioned above need to become long term changes that we maintain in our churches even after the pandemic has passed.

B. Supporting the Congregation to Grow Spiritually as Individuals

Question: How can we enable and grow the relationship of individuals with God.

Pastoral care may now need to be expanded to more lay individuals who are given the responsibility for the nurturing of a small group of believers. The home church may become the primary focus of the church of the future. It would be strategic for the church to equip these members to carry on the church life where they are – to worship God, to build one another up, and to reach others for God. In addition it is time for the church body to build up its capacity to equip the parents and believers in carrying out discipleship at home – inter-spousal, parent-children, and grandparent- grandchildren. Some element of home visiting of individuals may become a component of the ‘new-normal-church’, provided the same individual meet the same person each time. The traditional pastor's role may need to change from a primary leader to a facilitator and gradually aim to grow a group of leaders. The pastoral message can now be discussed so that people can minister to each other.

Meeting together on Sunday, for prayer meetings and bible study or small group meetings may become increasingly difficult for an extended time. It is hence important that we place a serious emphasis on growing the faith of individuals. We must not underestimate any individual person's ability to grow in their relationship with Jesus. We need to use this opportunity to shift from a Sunday focused church to one that lives every day in the life of the individual believer. We should move away from the believer as recipient, coming to the church each week to be fed, to one where the person is actively seeking God themselves. Our role is to offer guidance and resources.

The primary emphasis must be on establishing and deepening a relationship with the Father. Enabling members of our congregation to use silent-listening-to-God-times may be a meaningful way forward. Personal Spiritual Formation, the process of being conformed to the image or character of Jesus Christ, can take many forms. Some of the key areas that we should encourage the believer to develop include:

1. Contemplative or Listening Prayer (also called ‘Prayer of the heart’) – a silent listening to God in the spirit.
2. Audible Prayer and Worship - a vocal expression of our needs and worship of God.
3. Bible Study - a serious reading and study of God's word.
4. Scripture meditation (also called ‘Lectio Divina’ or sacred reading) - a method of listening to texts of scripture and allowing God to inspire us.
5. Journaling (also called a ‘prayer journal’) - a written record of the on-going relationship with God that aids in discernment, self-discovery and knowing God deeper.
6. Fasting – encouraging the use of limiting our food and media/electronic intake to better appreciate God's presence and voice.
7. And various other methods like meditative walking, community service, habit of reading spiritual material, practising the presence of God, etc.

There are many resources to aid personal spiritual formation in the form of books, training manuals by individual church denominations as well as online resources. Some of our local theological colleges and seminaries also provide online training. See the websites of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM), Malaysian Bible Seminary (MBS), Malaysian Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS) and other colleges. Some provide online courses in various languages.

It is important to recognise that there is a big difference between Christian education and discipleship. One focuses on knowledge, the other on commitment and change. The command given to us is to make disciples, followers of Jesus. When we do this it will automatically produce a vibrant and meaningful body of Christ. There is also a difference between ‘becoming a Christian and going to church’ and the gospel of the kingdom which Jesus preached. The kingdom was Jesus' primary agenda and should also be ours.

C. Supporting our Pastors, Church Workers, their Families and smaller Churches

Question: How can we proactively meet the need of our church pastors, workers and smaller churches?

We must take care at this time not to lose our workers or even have churches close down; this is a distinct possibility. As the congregation's financial gifts to the church may drop in this period, the church management may be tempted to cut the salaries of pastors and workers, especially those from smaller churches.

Many of those who had served us in the church in a full time or part-time paid capacity will need support in this period. We have to ensure that their salaries continue even if we cannot meet physically together and they cannot come to the church building. They also may not have the resources that many of us who work in the secular world have, to face this crisis long term, especially for their children's education.

Smaller churches with limited financial resources, smaller congregations or in rural communities may be at risk of closing.

We should adopt a number of initiatives proactively which include:

1. The congregation and church management must ensure continued support for all pastors, both full time and part-time, and their families. Support should not just be for sustenance but also for education needs of their children.
2. Larger, more financially stable churches should consider adopting smaller churches that are at financial risk of closing. This may be cross-denominational. Denominational differences should not matter as we are the body of Christ.
3. There may be a need for national oversight and a national co-ordinating database to identify both struggling churches and workers and ensure they are supported by linking them with churches that have resources.
4. Richer churches may also help support the development of digital services for rural churches. This may be by making hardware available, providing young persons with the expertise to set up digital services and funding the long term manpower required.
5. We may also need to identify members of the church that have been significantly affected economically (lost jobs, unable to earn a living) and offer sustainable support.

Church adoption takes place when a healthier church brings the people and assets of a struggling church into its church family. The adopted church becomes a campus of the adopting church. Church fostering is the process where a healthier church provides assistance and resources to a struggling church for a defined period, typically less than a year. Church fostering may or may not lead to church adoption.

Thom S. Rainer

D. Supporting Rural and Indigenous Church Communities

Question: How can we support rural church communities and indigenous churches?

See Appendix D that offers a checklist to use for rural communities and indigenous churches.

Churches in rural communities, especially indigenous and those in Sarawak and Sabah operate very differently from urban churches. Often a sizable proportion of the whole community are believers and they are more intimate and communal. Some would meet in smaller building, often without air-conditioning. This poses particular challenges in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. If they remain 'isolated' they have little risk of getting infected. But the entry of a single infected person, via food purchase, services or visits, has the potential for the entire community to be infected. In addition, many rural communities in Sarawak and Sabah have a greater proportion of older persons living there as the young have left for work in the cities. This poses a higher risk in term of mortality. Some indigenous communities (Orang Asli) have taken the step to 'barricade' themselves in, but this is not viable long term. These communities are also often resource poor in terms of digital devices, broadband access and affordability for Wi-Fi long term to establish and sustain any digital church environment.

While some ideas are offered in this document, it is important that the church hold consultations with rural communities and indigenous communities to explore the way forward on this issue. Special emphasis needs to be given to the need to keep the indigenous Christian community intact and strong during a time when they face mounting struggles.

Some practical points to consider in supporting rural and indigenous churches:

1. Visits to these communities from urban brothers and sisters (and any other visitors) should be limited to essential needs. It would be preferential that the same few, designated individuals visit the same villages each time there is need. All visitors should maintain safe physical distancing, wear masks, prevent any crowding, limit physical contact and talking, keep hands clean and keep surfaces clean at all times. Visits duration should be limited to the essential required. Communal meals should be avoided.
2. Village and indigenous communities should be trained as to the risk and prevention measures required for all visitors. Prevention messages may be required in a number of languages.
3. As some of these communities are often housed very closely to each other, it may be possible to use battery-operated loudhailers (megaphone) to conduct/communicate a service, share messages while they still remain in their individual homes (megaphones cost RM 100 upwards).
4. If they plan to meet as a congregation in their local church building we need to provide guidance as to spacing, ventilation, limited loud singing and other prevention issues outlined in Section A(2) above. There is much diversity and variability in the structure and size of these congregations. See Appendix D that offers ideas that will need to be adapted to the local setting.
5. If they are used to having external guest speakers coming for weekly services, then this could be done by some form of video or audio recording that is shared. Congregation sharing and interaction post message could be facilitated by a senior member of the congregation appointed to lead. Small, portable video players are available (they cost RM 400 upwards), some with chargeable batteries. There are also many Wi-Fi based portable speakers with batteries available (they cost RM 40 upwards).
6. The church will have to rethink short term missions and limit or stop them for the current period.

E. Supporting Poor and Immigrant Urban Communities

Question: How can we support those in our community who are more vulnerable?

Question: How can we support those outside Malaysia who are more vulnerable?

In the Bible, God has very clearly shown His concern towards widows, orphans, aliens and the poor; the most vulnerable parts of society. He has also emphasised that these marginalised groups in society deserve our special and regular attention. The COVID-19 has exposed the economic and family vulnerabilities of many in our community and abroad. Poor and migrant urban Christian communities in Malaysia pose a special challenge. Poverty and public negativity towards immigrants are the key issues to deal with. COVID-19 offers a 'wake-up' call to all of us to share our resources and wealth with others, as our Lord would want us to. The virus has given us an opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities in life and see them from the perspective of our Father and His eternal plans. Some in the church have been pursuing wealth and power and acquisition of things rather than pursuing the heart of God. We have an opportunity now to share our resources and bless not just the Body of Christ but also all of humanity who have yet to know Him deeply.

The church has been providing food and, at times, shelter to the poor during the MCO period. There were also laudable attempts to partner with non-Christian NGOs in terms of identifying, supporting and supplying the needs of the poorer communities. This should be encouraged to continue post-MCO. Some suggestions for life transforming giving and sharing of resources in this time:

1. The church should be vocal about any attempt to dehumanise immigrants or apportion blame on them for the COVID-19 pandemic or local spread.
2. Measures should be taken to educate them about COVID-19 and prevention strategies in languages appropriate to their community.
3. We should enable them to access any government support or aid offered.
4. The church must work collectively with other civil service organisations to ensure food security in the immediate and long term future. This may be in the form of setting up food banks for the very poor and destitute.
5. Mechanisms should be created to identify Christian immigrant communities that have specific needs.
6. Consider adopting a family and offering a monthly gift to tide over a family for 1-2 years.
7. Offer interest-free financial loans to people who have lost their businesses to restart.
8. Long term they will have issues regarding finding employment or getting repatriated. The church needs to play an active role for these needs.
9. Offering scholarships to poor children to enable them to complete basic or higher education is an important long term measure.
10. Join or support existing non-governmental organisations that are working with poor.
11. Consider setting up non-governmental organisations or civil society organisations that will work long-term to uplift the poor.
12. Consider downsizing our lives so that we can free up more resources for others.

We also need to consider that big church buildings may become poorly used in the next 2-3 years. Perhaps church buildings can be re-purposed to become community centres that can support the orphans, the widows, the aliens and the poor who are at the heart of God.

This coronavirus, like all 'successful' viruses, is spreading so well because it has found a way to exploit a good part of who we are. it has found a way to hijack our social nature. Covid-19 is hijacking the basic good of closeness and community.

May God keep us all safe in these difficult times. May we be the body of Christ to each other and the most vulnerable around us. And by doing so, may we come to receive with greater gratitude the body of Christ wherever he meets us.

Brian P. Flanagan

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic offers the church of our time to have a 'great awakening'. A turning back to our Lord and Saviour and focusing us on the most meaningful things in life – deepening our relationship with Him continually, a better understanding and knowing of ourselves and a stronger and vibrant relationship with our spiritual family and community. This is a time of reflection and action, a transformation - a time to live church rather than 'go to church'. It is a time for the church to come together and rest our denominational differences. The physical distancing the virus has caused may result in new solidarity that sees us in the time ahead.

As Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to affirm for all of us:

For I am convinced that
neither death nor life, (*nor coronavirus*)
neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future,
nor any powers,
neither height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Appendices

Appendix A: Important Contact Numbers of Local and National Ministry of Health Officers

If you have a COVID19 emergency or need advice call the State Crisis Preparedness and Response Centres (CPRCs) or the National CPRC at 03-88810200, 03-88810600, 03-88810700 or email cprc@moh.gov.my

Appendix 1

Contact Details for the State-level Crisis Preparedness and Response Centres				
State	Working hours	Telephone	Email	
1 Perlis	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	04-9766317	cprc.pls@moh.gov.my
	After Office hours or Public Holiday (PH)		019-2780408 019-4001070	
2 Kedah	Sunday - Wednesday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	04-7746081	vektor.kdh@moh.gov.my vektorkedah@moh.gov.my
	Thursday	8.00 - 3.30 pm	04-7746063	
	Friday, Saturday & PH	8.00 - 12.00 pm	04-7746072	
3 Pulau Pinang	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	04-2629902	epid_penang@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	10.00 - 2.00 pm		
4 Perak	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	05-2433962	cprcprk@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	10.00 - 2.00 pm		
5 Selangor	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	03-51237251	bgdenggisel@moh.gov.my cprc_sel@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	9.00 - 2.00 pm	03-51237252	
6 JKWPKL	Monday - Friday	7.30 - 5.30 pm	03-26977710 03-26977730	cprckl@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	11.00 - 3.00 pm	03-26983757	
7 Negeri Sembilan	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	06-7641326	cptbv_ns@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	8.00 - 5.00 pm		
8 Melaka	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	06-2883019 06-2345999	cprcmelaka@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	10.00 - 2.00 pm	06-2883019	
9 Johor	Sunday - Wednesday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	07-238 2217	cprcknj@gmail.com
	Thursday	8.00 - 3.30 pm	07-238 3305	
10 Pahang	Monday - Friday	9.00 - 5.00 pm	09-570 7910 09-570 7914 09-570 7909	cprc_pahang@moh.gov.my cdcpahang@moh.gov.my
	Sunday - Wednesday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	09-619 6269 09-635 3752	
11 Terengganu	Thursday	8.00 - 3.30 pm	09-619 6269	kpbv.trg@moh.gov.my bgerakan.trg@moh.gov.my
	Friday, Saturday & PH	9.00 - 3.30 pm	09-619 6269	
12 Kelantan	Sunday - Wednesday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	09-747 2089	cprc_kel@moh.gov.my
	Thursday	8.00 - 3.30 pm		
13 Sabah	Friday, Saturday & PH	8.00 - 12.00 pm	088-219455	sbhcprc@moh.gov.my
	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	088-512531 088-512533	
14 Sarawak	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	082-443248	cprc_sarawak@moh.gov.my
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	9.00 - 3.00 pm		
15 WP Labuan	Monday - Friday	8.00 - 5.00 pm	087-410973 016-9195425	cprclabuan@gmail.com
	Saturday, Sunday & PH	8.00 - 1.00 pm	016-9195426	

Appendix B: Effective Disinfecting Solutions against Coronavirus for Cleaning the Environment

For routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and objects, wear disposable gloves and use household bleach diluted with water (1:100 ratio, e.g. 10ml bleach to 1 litre water) or alcohol solutions with at least 60-70% alcohol. For effective disinfecting solution against coronavirus refer to this [cleaning and disinfecting guideline from CDC USA](#) and this [Interim List of Household Products and Active Ingredients for Disinfection of the COVID-19 Virus](#) from the National Environment Agency, Singapore and our local MOH guide: Guidelines COVID-19 management version 5/2020 by MOH, a PowerPoint update reproduced below.

Active Ingredients and Their Working Concentrations Effective Against Coronaviruses



Active Ingredient (A.I.)
Accelerated hydrogen peroxide (0.5%) ^a
Benzalkonium chloride* (0.05%) ^b
Chloroxylenol (0.12%) ^c
Ethyl alcohol (70%) ^d
Iodine in iodophor (50 ppm) ^b
Isopropanol (50%) ^b
Povidone-iodine (1% iodine) ^d
Sodium hypochlorite (0.05 – 0.5%) ^{d, e}
Sodium chlorite (0.23%) ^b

Source: NEA, Singapore

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List of Household Disinfectants / Cleaning Products Effective Against COVID-19



Product Name	Active Ingredients
CIF Power & Shine Multipurpose Anti-Bac Spray 700ml	Benzalkonium chloride (0.75%)
CIF Professional All Purpose Cleaner	Benzalkonium chloride (0.75%)
CIF Professional Disinfectant Floor Cleaner 5L	Benzalkonium chloride (1.2-1.4%)
Clorox Disinfectant Wipes	Benzalkonium chloride (0.184%)
Clorox Scentiva Disinfecting Multi-Surface Cleaner (Various Scents)	Benzalkonium chloride (0.3%)
Dettol Anti-bacterial Surface Cleanser Trigger Spray	Benzalkonium chloride (0.096%)
Magiclean Floor Cleaner (Various Scent)	Benzalkonium chloride (0.7%)
Magiclean Wiper Wet Sheets	Benzalkonium chloride (0.05%)
Mr Muscle Multi-Purpose Cleaner (Various Scents)	Benzalkonium chloride (0.1-0.5%)
Dettol Antiseptic Disinfectant Liquid	Chloroxylenol (4.8%)
Dettol Antiseptic Germicide	Chloroxylenol (4.8%)
Clorox All Purpose Cleaner with Bleach	Sodium hypochlorite (2.4%)
Clorox Bleach Original	Sodium hypochlorite (5.25%)
Clorox Clean-Up All-Purpose Cleaner with Bleach (Various Scents)	Sodium hypochlorite (2.4%)
Clorox Clean-Up Cleaner + Bleach	Sodium hypochlorite (1.84%)

Source: NEA, Singapore

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Appendix C: Checklist for the Urban Church - Adjusting Physical Church Services to make them Safer to Attend

This checklist is applicable to the urban churches in the city or towns that operate with reasonable sized congregations and often a closed air-conditioned building.

	Area	Suggestions	Your Plans/Adaptions
1.	Preparing a Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans to re-open church services should be undertaken now and be put in writing by the church team and board Recommended for first 2-4 weeks after MCO lifted not to start any services but finalise plans Take a video/still images of church building/premises/area to enable the church team and board to plan a more effective strategy 	
2.	Size and Frequency of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no optimal size for safety Aim for smaller, more frequent services to space out the congregation/numbers; consider decreasing the main service to 30% of previous attendance (i.e. conduct 3 services) The group that come for each specific service should be the same group that comes for each subsequent Sunday service Much larger churches may consider having even more services spread throughout the week 	
3.	Safe Physical Distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to separate one family from another by at least 1-2 meters when seated Place all chairs at a minimum of 1 meter apart, 2 metres is preferable Have markers on the floor to indicate chair locations For fixed or joined chairs, indicate which chairs can be used and cross out the ones that cannot - place people diagonally for further safe physical distancing 	
4.	Air-conditioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air-conditioners re-circulate air and also create a draft that may spread droplets within a building Preferable to turn off air-conditioning, ventilate the building (open windows) If not feasible consider pre-cooling the room prior to the service and then use low setting (minimal) air-conditioning Open air services and very early morning services should also be considered Some churches have experimented with services in outdoor parking lots with parishioners seated in their cars (air-conditioning off, windows down) 	
5.	Singing During Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking and singing spreads droplets wider than 1-2 meters (~ up to 4 metres) and singing with masks on is also difficult Reconsider singing as part of the worship service - perhaps engage in silent, contemplative worship or hum songs in unison 	
6.	Enhance Protection for Vulnerable and Senior Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need priority services for vulnerable and senior members Offer separate seating behind a glass enclosure if available Offer live participating from home Maintain a list of all vulnerable members (aged 60 years and above and those with chronic health problems), contact them by phone to check about their preferences for church services 	
7.	Options to be Involved from Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even with re-established physical services online services should be maintained as an option for those who choose to remain at home or feel too vulnerable to participate online 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain both digital and physical church services simultaneously 	
8.	Sermons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With multiple smaller services on the same day it may be fatiguing for the pastor to deliver the same sermon repeatedly • Sermons could be delivered once to the first congregation present (with live-streaming to those at home) • Subsequent service will use a recorded version • Services and sermons must be kept brief/short • If the pulpit is close to the congregation then consider a plastic shield between the pastor and the audience (or wear a face shield when speaking) 	
9.	Electronic Offering/Giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting physical notes should be phased out as they pose a transmission risk • Encourage the congregation to plan their giving and give electronically • For those who would like to give weekly at the service (direct gifts), offer physical QR codes that can be scanned by their hand phone to make the offering • Need to explore and identify the best, safe platform for digital money transfer for common use (there are Christian-based online giving platforms that have been developed) • Support individuals will be required in each church to help those less digitally capable to set up online giving 	
10.	Communion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of communion to the congregation in its current format poses transmission risks • Consider initially not having communion until other safety practices are well established • When re-introducing communion, consider making it infrequent initially • Churches that share a communion cup should stop the practice and move to individual cups • Perhaps the communion style of believers from other denominations (e.g. Catholics) should be explored to find the safest option 	
11.	Sunday Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See separate guidance written for child care centres that will apply for Sunday School available in 4 languages here: http://www.necicmalaysia.org/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=6&action=view&retrieveid=118 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Prevention Safety Measures to Implement 	
12.	Staff & Congregation Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct training of all staff (including cleaners and security) and the congregation on COVID-19 safety and prevention issues • Plan re-training on a regular basis (bi-weekly initially then monthly) • Have written guidelines that are prominently displayed for staff at key locations • Focus training on: safe physical distancing, avoid touching faces, mask wearing, prevent crowding when in church, limit physical contact and talking, keep hands clean at all times, keep surfaces clean at all times 	
13.	Masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the immediate future all members of the congregation and staff should wear masks on arrival at the church, while in the building and until they leave 	
14.	Screening at Church Entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform temperature screening at the entrance for everyone (including staff) • Use non-contact thermometers (temperature scans) • Any person with a temperature of 37.5°C and above should be asked to rest at home and not enter the church 	

15.	Alcohol-based Hand Sanitisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available alcohol-based hand sanitisers to the congregation on entry to the church and on departing 	
16.	Socialising & Talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The congregation and church staff should be reminded not to socialise in groups • Avoid mingling in the corridor or common spaces on arrival or leaving • Encourage everyone not to talk unless necessary 	
17.	Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid any meals at the church premises for the congregation 	
18.	Physical Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handshakes, hugging and other demonstrations of physical contact are to be discouraged 	
19.	Toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toilets are a risk location for transmission of coronavirus • Encourage the congregation to use their own home toilets before coming to limit/reduce the use at the church • Advise staff and the congregation to close the toilet seat cover after using and before flushing the toilet, to reduce waste aerosol transmission • Consider replacing all tap-heads in public toilets with elbow-operated heads (or sensor based taps) to reduce infection risk via tap use • Make available adequate liquid soap in all public toilets • Foot-operated soap dispensers would be ideal • Avoid the use of hot-air hand dryers/blowers as they are well recognized to spread virus and germs 	
20.	Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The congregation and staff should be discouraged from wearing gloves as this gives a false sense of security and become a risk to others and self • Disposable gloves should only be worn during cleaning activities by staff and then discarded 	
21.	Bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available foot-operated bins with covers at the entrance/exit of the church and toilets 	
22.	Congregation Member who Travels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once travel restrictions are lifted advise all members of the congregation and staff who travel overseas to avoid visiting the church for 14 days • Staff who have just returned from overseas mandatory, paid 14-day leave of absence to enable quarantine 	
23.	COVID-19 Emergency Contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have available the contact numbers of the State Crisis Preparedness and Response Centres (CPRCs) of Local or National Ministry of Health Officers (see Appendix A) 	
24.	New Cleaning Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable gloves and plastic bags need to be made available for emergency use to clean up body fluid spills • Church floors should be cleaned before any service (in-between services) and at least at the end of the work day • For a list of effective disinfecting solutions against coronavirus for cleaning the church premises see Appendix B • Clean chairs used by the congregation between services - invest in plastic chairs that can easily be disinfected after use by each person • Remove all 'unnecessary items' from the church common areas to avoid having to clean them or contaminate them (including reading materials, and other communally-used objects). • Keep items pinned on soft boards to a bare minimum of essential health messages 	

Appendix D: Checklist to use for Rural Communities and Indigenous Churches to Modify Services

This checklist is more applicable for churches that meet in smaller building, often without air-conditioning.

Churches that use air-conditioning should also look at Appendix C.

	Area	Suggestions	Your Plans/Adaptions
1.	Preparing a Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans to re-open church services should be undertaken now and be put in writing or a video (if written literacy is an issue) Rural community and indigenous churches may require the support of external individuals or church organisations to assist in thinking through planning It will be important to map out such support & have a national database. Recommended for first 2-4 weeks after MCO lifted not to start any services but finalise plans Take a video/still images of church building/premises/area to enable the team to plan a more effective strategy 	
2.	External Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some rural community and indigenous churches rely heavily on visiting speakers and external support Visits to these communities from brothers and sisters (and any other visitors) should be limited to essential needs The same few, designated individuals visit the same villages each time there is need All visitors should maintain safe physical distancing, wear masks, prevent any crowding, limit physical contact and talking, keep hands clean and keep surfaces clean at all times Visits duration should be limited to the essential required Communal meals with visitors should be avoided 	
3.	Staff & Congregation Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village and indigenous communities should be trained as to the risk of COVID-19 and prevention measures They should also be trained on minimising the risk from visitors Prevention messages may be required in a number of languages and be best put in a video format 	
4.	a. Church Services for Communities that are Very Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These communities are largely safe from COVID-19 unless a visiting family member, external church member or trade person comes to their village. They can probably continue as they are functioning currently with little modification However every single member of the village, believer or not, must be trained on COVID-19, prevention measures and minimising the risk from visitors 	
	b. Church Services for Communities that are Less Interior & have a greater Admixture or Travel from Other Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These communities are less safe from COVID-19 Consider if the church is small enough to have services with safe physical distancing – if yes then modify the seating arrangement and obtain ideas from Appendix C about modifying singing, communion, enhanced protection of vulnerable members, etc If the congregation is larger (relative to size of the building) adopt ideas from Appendix C on multiple services, etc 	

5.	Other Suggestions on how to Conduct Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As some of these communities are often housed very closely to each other, it may be possible to use battery-operated loudhailers (megaphone) to conduct/communicate a service, share messages while they still remain in their individual homes (megaphones cost RM 100 upwards) If they are used to having external guest speakers coming for weekly services, then this could be done by some form of video or audio recording that is shared Without a speaker/pastor, congregation sharing and interaction post message could be facilitated by a senior member of the congregation appointed to lead. Small, portable video players are available (they cost RM 400 upwards), some with chargeable batteries. There are also many Wi-Fi based portable speakers with batteries available (they cost RM 40 upwards) 	
6.	New Cleaning Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatever the rural church setting, it would be good to institute enhanced cleaning routines Church floors should be cleaned before any service (in-between services) and at least at the end of each service For a list of effective disinfecting solutions against coronavirus for cleaning the church premises see Appendix B Clean chairs used by the congregation between services or at the end of the service - invest in plastic chairs that can easily be disinfected after use by each person Remove all 'unnecessary items' from the church common areas to avoid having to clean them or contaminate them (including reading materials, and other communally-used objects) 	
7.	Physical Contact & Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid communal meals Handshakes, hugging and other demonstrations of physical contact are to be discouraged 	
8.	Socialising & Talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The congregation and church staff should be reminded not to socialise in groups Avoid mingling on arrival or leaving Encourage everyone not to talk unless necessary 	
9.	Masks and Alcohol-based Hand Sanitisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks and use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers may be necessary for the larger rural churches that have a greater flow of people from outside their community 	
10.	Congregation Member who Travels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once travel restrictions are lifted advise all members of the congregation and staff who travel to the cities/towns to avoid visiting the church for 14 days 	

Appendix E: Checklist for Restructuring the Church Office Environment

As you plan to return to the office, here is a checklist of some of the things you need to consider and prepare for:

	Area	Suggestions	Your Plans/Adaptions
1.	Managing public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buses, trains and LRTs are higher risk for transmission, especially those with closed windows and air-conditioning Wear a mask, avoid touching your face, keep some distance from other passengers if possible, limit touching surfaces, sanitise your hands before getting on-board & on disembarking If possible open windows to increase airflow Car-pooling if possible but keep to the same group all the time 	
2.	Office has prepared a standard operating policy (SOP) to minimise staff risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every office will need a SOP/checklist Give a copy to all staff Need to train all staff (by phone or video call), including the cleaners and security guards 	
3.	Limiting the number of people who enter and leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicable to large church organisations We need to prevent a mass entry and exodus of people. One way is to stagger entry and leaving times as well as consider having multiple exits and entrances Consider foot-operated door openers or motion-sensor automatic office doors 	
4.	Staggered working hours or work from home to reduce office congestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the possibility of staggered and reduced working hours Some staff can come for the first half of the day (8am-12noon) and the others come in the second half of the day (1-5 pm) Another option is for staff to take turns to come and work on alternate days A clear work from home policy might be applicable for some staff, provided there are clear guidelines that do not allow the staff to be disturbed outside office hours 	
5.	Office buildings with lifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifts are closed environments and, if packed, a high risk for transmission Use the stairs if possible, otherwise have a limit to the number that can travel in the lift at any one time, with masks on and all facing different directions in the lift Require 'standing spots' (circles) marked out in all lifts There may be a need to have 1 meter queue lines or circles outside the lift 	
6.	Office air-conditioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult area to modify with the current 'closed' structure of many of our offices Attempt to increase ventilation by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning Consider installing high quality air filters (HEPA filters) in offices to prevent re-circulated air from spreading the virus 	
7.	Modifying the open office environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open office environments have a higher risk for the virus spreading Consider reducing the number of employees working at any one time (see staggered suggestions above) as well as putting up partitions between work stations Seating arrangements should be such that staff are at least 1 to 2 meters distance apart Use floor marks around all work stations to 	

		<p>indicate personal space that is not to be encroached on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid co-working spaces or desk sharing • Consider looking at templates or office design online to help plan and reorganise your office environment (see the new design concept called the "Six Feet Office") 	
8.	Modify the office meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office meetings are high risk events, especially if the meeting or discussion room is full • Plan to meet electronically, even when you are in the same building/office • Use conference/video calls extensively and limit face-to-face meetings to a very small number of people that are spaced out in a room 	
9.	Avoid contamination of common used items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourage the sharing of office supplies and equipment • Reduce multiple person contact with the photocopy machines and printers 	
10.	Pantry, prayer area and common staff areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are recognised as very high risk areas and should be avoided • Staff should be encouraged to bring packed food and eat at their own work station • Be concerned about the frequently, commonly used office coffee maker; perhaps avoid its use for now • Prayer times may need to be staggered and preferably done at their own work station 	
11.	Plan for mask safety and changing masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are wearing masks primarily to protect others from our saliva droplets - I protect you and you protect me • We cannot be certain who is infected as many are asymptomatic • Different masks have different capability. Ideally N-95 and 3-ply surgical masks should be reserved for healthcare professionals • When using cloth masks remember that you will require at least two. Half way through a work day, at the meal break time, remove the used mask correctly and put it into a plastic bag. Wash your hands with soap and water (or alcohol-based hand sanitiser) and have your meal. Then clean hands again and wear the second clean mask. • Remember to ensure the cleaning staff and security have adequate masks provided by the management 	
12.	Plan to limit staff socialising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage staff not to socialise at the office, even in small groups, especially at arrival, lunch or when leaving • Instead, advise staff to confine communication to work-related needs 	
13.	Policy for the toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toilets are high-risk surface contact areas and often poorly ventilated • Require clear guidelines to be displayed on the toilet door (both sides) on steps to take to minimise contamination • Foot-operated soap dispensers and door openers would be ideal • Invest in elbow-operated or contactless tap-heads to enable easier hand washing • Advise staff to close the toilet seat cover after using and before flushing, to reduce waste aerosol transmission • Door handles need to be disinfected by the person using the toilet when entering and leaving • Install waste disposal bins with foot pedal- 	

		<p>operated covers at the exit from toilets for disposal of tissue used to turn off taps or open doors (all bins on the premises should be foot operated and covered)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid the use of hot-air hand dryers/blowers as they are well recognized to spread virus and germs 	
14.	New cleaning routine for the office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean and disinfect all frequently touched and common user surfaces in the office like door knobs, elevator buttons, toilet sink heads, handrails, light switches, countertops, etc • Floors should be cleaned at least daily • For routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and objects, wear disposable gloves and use household bleach diluted with water (1:100 ratio, e.g. 10ml bleach to 1 litre water) or alcohol solutions with at least 60-70% alcohol. • Explore the possibility of using UV lighting to disinfect offices at night (used in some hospitals) but without compromising safety • One or two persons should be designated to ensure adequate supplies of toilet paper, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand sanitisers, etc 	
15.	Use gloves optimally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposable gloves should only be worn during cleaning activities and then discarded • Staff, security and cleaners should be discouraged from wearing gloves all the time as this gives a false sense of security and may become a risk to others and self 	
16.	Policy if someone is unwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff who are unwell (i.e. fever or acute respiratory symptom like cough or running nose) should be encouraged to stay at home and inform their respective supervisor/ administrator & should be given paid leave • Staff who have just returned from overseas should be offered mandatory, paid 14-day leave of absence to quarantine themselves • Have a plan what to do if a staff member becomes sick while at work 	
17.	Dealing with travelling, site visits, conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the next few months it would be wise to defer all conferences and travel, even within the country • Air travel may pose a high risk for infection • Inter-church visits and inter-office meetings should be conducted electronically 	
18.	Plan to minimise virus transmission to the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you reach home avoid interacting with other household members or touching surfaces • Soak your clothes worn to the work place in soap and water and have a shower immediately 	

Some useful References:

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2. Thom S. Rainer. What Will The Post-Coronavirus Church Look Like? March 18th, 2020. Available here: <https://thomrainer.com/2020/03/what-will-the-post-coronavirus-church-look-like/>
3. Thom S. Rainer. The Foster Church Movement. March 16th, 2020. Available here: <https://thomrainer.com/2020/03/the-foster-church-movement/>
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6. By Carey Nieuwhof. 5 Predictions about the Future Church while Everything's still Unknown. Available here: <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-predictions-about-the-future-church-while-everythings-still-unknown/>
7. Daniel Ang. Big questions: the Pandemic, our Mission and the New Evangelisation. The Catholic Weekly. April 21th, 2020. Available here: <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/big-questions-the-pandemic-our-mission-and-the-new-evangelisation/>
8. Heidi A Campbell (Editor). The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online. 2020 BY-NC-SA. Available here: <https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/187891>