



**NATIONAL CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**  
SRI LANKA

# RESPONDING TO COVID-19

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Biblical and Practical Guidelines for Churches  
In Dealing with the Covid-19 Situation

# OVERVIEW

The spread of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka has brought out many challenging questions about daily life. This includes questions related to the religious life of Sri Lankans as well.



SHOULD WE CANCEL COMMUNAL GATHERINGS AIMED TO WORSHIP GOD?



SHOULD WE POSTPONE EVENTS MEANT TO REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE OUR FAITH?



# HOWEVER, THE DEEPER, FAR REACHING, UNASKED QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- IS OUR CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY DAMAGED WHEN WE CANCEL WORSHIP GATHERINGS?
- IS THE INTEGRITY OF CHRISTIAN GATHERINGS COMPROMISED WHEN WE CANCEL THEM?
- IS CANCELLING SERVICES EVIDENCE FOR A PASTOR'S LACK OF FAITH?
- IS CHOOSING TO AVOID CHRISTIAN GATHERINGS EVIDENCE FOR A CHRISTIAN'S LACK OF COMMITMENT?



# GUIDELINE 01

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GOD IS CONCERNED WITH HUMANITY'S HOLISTIC WELL-BEING  
(LEVITICUS 17-26)



The laws reveal that the physical, social, economic, and religious are closely intertwined.



Hygienic laws have spiritual bearings. Social laws have spiritual import.



# GUIDELINE 02

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## CHRISTIANS NEED TO CONSIDER THE WIDER COMMUNITY IN DECISION-MAKING



“Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial” (1 Cor. 6:12).  
What one might consider as harmless to the self might be detrimental to others.



By insisting our individual preferences, we may fail to act in love  
(Rom 14:15).



We must be willing to refrain from doing things that endanger the life  
and well-being of others, even if they may be harmless or even good to  
us personally.



# GUIDELINE 03

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## ZEAL AND KNOWLEDGE MUST GO TOGETHER (PROVERBS 19:2)

- The exercise of faith must be accompanied by practical knowledge.
- Making decisions using faith as the sole criteria, in the face of overwhelming information is like building a castle on sand while observing big waves coming.
- Facts are God's signposts to guide us in making faith-based decisions.
- Faith and facts are not opposites; they are complementary.



# GUIDELINE 04

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## WE MUST CHOOSE WHICH BATTLES TO FIGHT



In Exodus 13:17-18, God commands the Israelites to take a detour in going to the Promise Land instead of going through the Philistine country, though it was shorter. God knew that the Israelites would engage the Philistines in battle, and even though He was guiding them, it was not a war God wanted them to have.



Not all enemies must be faced head-on; some battles are better avoided.



# GUIDELINE 05

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## MAINTAIN THE BALANCE BETWEEN DIVINE ORDER AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

- We must be prudent in making decisions; we must not excuse ourselves from carelessness based on faith in an all-powerful God who can answer our prayers
- God gives us freedom to make choices, and He does not always intervene to prevent us from failing. We have to face the consequences of our actions
- God is God; He can choose whether or not to intervene; either way, He remains God.



# UNDERSTANDING CONTAINMENT AND RESPONDING TO COVID-19



# UNDERSTANDING CONTAINMENT

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Church leaders should know the basic steps in containment so they can support them and ease any community concerns they may detect

- Community engagement: The community must embrace containment and promote participation by all community members.
- Early case detection and diagnosis: The community must accept the need for testing, including when to seek testing.
- Comprehensive contact tracing: Public health workers must identify the source of an infection in order to prevent it from spreading further.
- Prompt patient isolation
- Supportive clinical care

In addition to these basic actions, containment also depends on

- Education
- Community Trust



# LESS INVASIVE CONTAINMENT ACTIONS

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- **HYGIENE**

- It appears Covid-19 is spread by droplets from coughing or sneezing. Thus proper hygiene for coughing and hand hygiene are essential.

- **TESTING**

- Tests are limited in supply but improving. Other illnesses have similar symptoms, such as a cold or flu, so testing is necessary for accurate diagnosis.

- **SURVEILLANCE**

- Monitor a community for signs of outbreak.

- **EDUCATION**

- People need to understand how disease spreads and the importance of hygiene.

- **COMMUNICATION MONITORING**

- Fear and anger lead to rumours that interfere with containment. Monitoring discussions will help detect developing rumors.



# MORE INVASIVE CONTAINMENT ACTIONS

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- **SOCIAL DISTANCING**
  - Promote people to keep space.
- **QUARANTINE**
  - This can be difficult because it is a major disruption of a person's daily life. Social support can be critical to successful quarantine.
- **CASE ISOLATION**
  - Isolating an infected individual quickly and keeping them isolated is critical..
- **TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS**
  - The evidence for this is mixed, but generally people are encouraged to limit travel. People coming from areas with high infections rates should self-quarantine.



# HOW CHURCHES COULD RESPOND

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MODEL RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR IN THE COMMUNITY



HEALTH EDUCATION



MONITOR COMMUNICATIONS AND FACILITATE ACCURATE INFORMATION



# MODEL RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR IN THE COMMUNITY

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- Hand hygiene resources are needed in the church, home, and community.
- Say and show that the resources are very important.
- Have hand hygiene resources in the church, model their use, and recruit church members to promote proper use.
  - Having the resources available is good, but not modeling their use sends a message that their use is not important.
- Advocate for hand hygiene resources in the community.



# HEALTH EDUCATION

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- Education needs to occur repeatedly and should be reinforced by integrating it into all aspects of church life.
  - Sermons on disease
  - Bible studies
  - Discussion groups
  - Church action teams
- Education should answer basic questions, such as
  - How is the disease spread?
  - What are the symptoms?
  - What should I do if I think I am infected?



# COMMUNICATION

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- Community rumours feed fear and block containment and eradication.
- Refrain from sharing unverified information.
- A communication plan should have at least two elements:
  - Positive Focus: Regular communication on the state of the epidemic, progress on hand hygiene and containment, reinforcing positive actions
  - Countering Negative: Detect fears and rumors early and counter them with accurate and evidence-based information. Do this as quickly as possible, the longer rumours persist the more entrenched they become.



# PRACTICAL STEPS



# STEP 01: TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH AND THE HEALTH OF OTHERS

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- **We can do this by following the guidelines set by the World Health Organization:**
  - Wash your hands regularly with soap
  - Disinfect your hands with alcohol-based solutions
  - Avoid touching your face
  - Abstain from physical contact with others



## STEP 02: AVOID ORGANISING LARGE GATHERINGS AND CONGREGATING IN LARGE CROWDS

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- Temporarily cancel worship gatherings camps and retreats, regular fellowships, and outreach ministries.
- The NCEASL recommends, upon the discretion of church leaders, to cancel Sunday worship services for at least two weeks.
- Use alternate avenues of meeting apart, from being physically present together such as online forums.



## STEP 03: THE CHURCH MUST BECOME A PART OF THE SOLUTION, AND NOT ANOTHER PROBLEM

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- The church must not intentionally gather people, encourage social distancing, and comply with the government's health regulations.
- Instead of insisting on what God can do for us, we must think how God can use us for our country and for others.



## STEP 04: BE CONSIDERATE OF THE VULNERABLE

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- Assist the weak, elderly, poor and those earning daily wages monetarily, materially or otherwise.
- Encourage your congregation to be mindful of others in purchasing daily necessities and to refrain from hoarding supplies unnecessarily.



## STEP 05:

### KNOW THE LAW

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- **Section 98 of the Police Ordinance No 16 of 1865 states:**  
*“false reports to alarm people and create panic to be an offence with imprisonment or fine.”*
- **Penal Code section 262, 263 & 264 provides for offences relating to public health:**
  - Negligent act likely to spread infection or any disease dangerous to life.
  - Malicious act likely to spread infection or any disease dangerous to life.
  - Disobedience to a quarantine rule.



# STEP 05:

## KNOW THE LAW

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- **The law on Quarantine and Prevention of diseases**

**Ordinance No 3/1897 provides for, among other things:**

- Establishing, maintaining, regulating, and managing quarantine stations.
- Isolating all cases of disease and diseased persons.
- Inspecting persons travelling by railway or otherwise, segregation of persons in hospitals or otherwise.
- Removal of diseased persons to hospitals or other places for medical treatment, and their detention until they can be discharged.



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7



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