

Coronavirus – COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions For Faith-Based Communities

Updated November 11, 2020

Community- and faith-based organizations, working together with schools, businesses, healthcare systems, and state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of COVID-19, especially among high-risk populations.

Q: How can I hold a religious ceremony and still adhere to social distancing and crowd sizes?

- **Consider a “drive-in” service.** Set up an outdoor space for attendees to drive up in their cars and participate in the service from their cars.
 - Email out the bulletin and song lyrics ahead of time.
 - Do not pass the offering plate, communion, or anything else from car to car.
- **Livestream small group and parish meetings.** Whether it’s a virtual book club, Bible study, prayer group or small group, empower attendees to coordinate with others who are involved in ministry groups or share various interests to meet weekly for a video call.
- **Continue recurring parish meetings through a conference call or video calls (e.g. Google Hangouts, GoTo Meeting, Zoom).** Even if events are canceled, personal and spiritual check-ins can continue.
- **When holding in-person services, items should not be shared or distributed between different parties and when possible promote maintaining a six (6) foot distance between parties and limit the ability to congregate.**

Q: I am planning a funeral. How can I include as many people as possible while still adhering to social distancing and crowd size requirements?

Livestream funerals so people can attend remotely. This is a solution that allows you to have the closest immediate family members at the funeral service in person while other people participate from home. Live chat can be included for anyone who may not have a webcam at home but still wants to be actively involved in the funeral service. Multimedia offerings can be provided to remote attendees, including the funeral program, written eulogy, and family photos and videos.

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Q: We don’t have internet access in our church, so we can’t livestream. What should we do?

Both Facebook and YouTube have options called “Premiere” that will allow you to pre-record, load, and schedule a video of your service to start at a certain time. This provides a similar feel and comments section interaction of a livestream, but does not require you to broadcast live with WiFi from your building. [This article has tips on setting up your video premiere.](#)

Q: A member of our faith-based community has tested positive for COVID-19. What should we do now?

- **Coordinate with local health officials.** Once learning of a person with confirmed COVID-19 who has been in the facility, immediately notify local health officials. These officials will have guidance for administrators and leaders to determine a course of action, which may include tracing the contacts of that person.
- Local health officials can offer guidance for closing the facility or restricting access (who can enter or what areas of the facility can be accessed). An initial short-term closure may be recommended to allow time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation.
- During this time, make decisions in consultation with local health officials as to whether group activities that would have been held in the facility should be moved to alternate locations.
- **Clean and disinfect thoroughly.** Close off areas used by the ill persons and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
- Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces. In areas where ill persons have visited or used, continue routine cleaning and disinfection as in this guidance.

Q: How can we stay engaged with our church members during this time, and continue to offer our church's services and outreach ministries?

Implement strategies to continue essential services for the people you serve.

- **Consider the needs of persons at higher risk of severe illness and those who may be more impacted socially or economically.** Identify ways to ensure the safety and social well-being of groups that may be especially impacted.
 - Ensure availability of meal programs and other assistance for the people you serve, including transportation services. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bags or delivery; avoid distribution of food or other household essentials in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd.
- **Follow recommended precautions for caregivers (i.e., outreach workers and others who visit persons with COVID-19 symptoms) in a nonhealthcare setting:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html#precautions>
 - Consider working with the local health department, a local hospital, healthcare agency, or service organization, such as the American Red Cross, to provide infection control training to caregivers who will serve your members or clients.
- **Implement alternative meeting and service options.**
 - Provide phone and online (live or recorded) meeting and service options, if possible. Determine how to:
 - ◆ Train staff and volunteers to use the necessary technology
 - ◆ Triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff
 - ◆ Address the potential lack of access to computers and the Internet among members and people you serve.
 - Mailed newsletters, prerecorded messages from trusted leaders on a designated call-in telephone number, and printed copies of daily teaching guides may be options, especially to reach those without internet access.



- For religious services, give people the option to watch online (live or recorded), if possible. In addition to technology, this involves permission from religious leaders that it is acceptable to not attend religious services in person. Viewers can send a comment via the online/livestream platform or an email or text to let you know they were watching. This also may involve permission or guidance about the use of electronic devices at times when that practice is usually not permitted, such as Jewish Sabbath.
- **Leverage existing ministries and activities.** Pivot your church’s ongoing ministry efforts in new ways that address the needs created by COVID-19. Rather than starting from scratch, begin with what your church is already doing to serve others.
 - Identify the current ministries and activities your church is engaged in that could be used to help address the impact of the COVID-19.
 - Use existing communications methods and programs to instill hope in response to concerns about COVID-19.
 - Care for people’s spiritual, emotional, physical, social, and safety needs.
 - Consider ways your church helps bring calm and encouragement to stressful situations; comfort worries over COVID-19.
 - Leverage ways your church is already speaking out on behalf of the marginalized and vulnerable; ensure the fair distribution of resources so that these groups don’t fall through the cracks amidst the public health crisis at hand.
- If your community is eventually advised to avoid contact with others outside the home, you can exchange in-person visits with regular calls to check in on those you have been serving.
 - To watch religious services online, check with your local church or check the media for directories.

Q: Are nurseries and Sunday school services allowed?

Yes, children present at services should remain with their parents or guardians and limit congregating or interacting with children of other parties on the premises, when possible. Nurseries and Sunday School is permitted and must follow “daycare/childcare services” section requirements in the Directed Health Measures.

