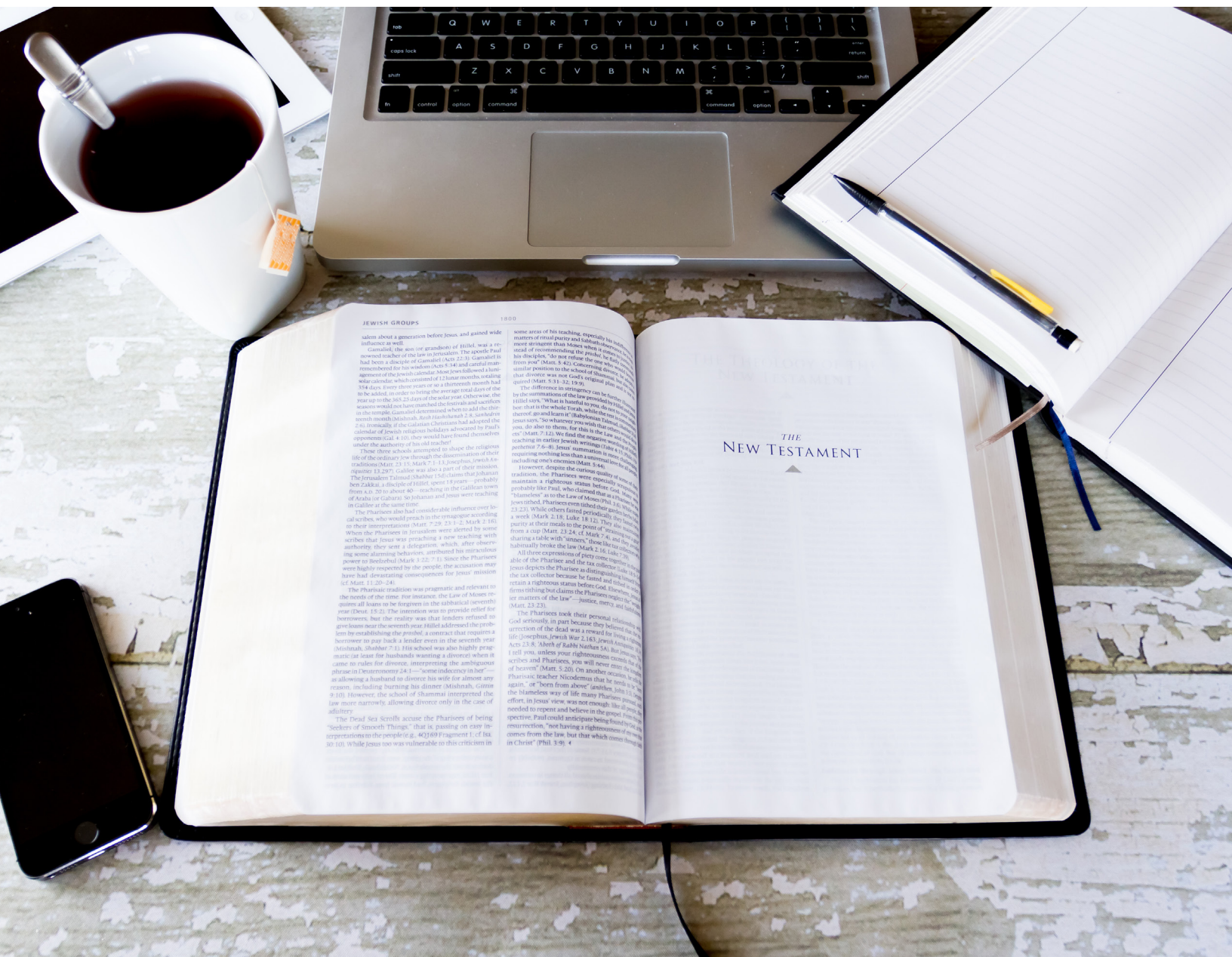




COVID-19 PASTORAL CARE ASSESSMENT

12 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS



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INTRODUCTION

Maintaining contact is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, the uncertainties of the pandemic, along with the many complications it has produced, make it difficult to know how to reach out to your congregation. To help you, we've created a set of questions to use as a general framework for checking on members of your congregation.

QUESTIONS

When checking on a member of your congregation, you can start with a general inquiry:

1. "How have you been since we last talked?"

That may or may not yield much information. If it does not, then you can proceed with:

2. "Are there any questions or concerns you've been thinking about since we last talked?"

If the person has a clear response, note how the questions or concerns are framed: Is there a sense of shock, desperation, exasperation, or perhaps a more benign curiosity?



If the person has concerns (anxiety, distress, etc.) but is having difficulty articulating those concerns, ask if you can suggest some possibilities. This can be valuable because the more vague a concern is, the more ominous it can become in a person's thinking.

However, for your suggestions to be most helpful, you probably will need more information.

3. "What situations or experiences prompted those concerns?"

This can help clarify the significance attached to the concerns. Asking about specifics like this takes quick, general responses (that can be ambiguous and vague in their intent) and offers more details that ultimately bring you closer to a clearer understanding of what the person is dealing with.

There are a number of commonly cited challenges associated with the restrictions imposed on us because of the pandemic. Therefore, you might ask:



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4. “How much time do you spend watching coverage of the pandemic on TV?”

5. “How much time do you spend on social media? What kinds of things are being posted?”

People who expose themselves to a lot of media coverage about the pandemic can get overwhelmed by what they hear—especially given the quick way media outlets try to get information out to their audiences, which, in this situation, means receiving a lot of changing ideas or suggestions. People would do well to limit their intake of pandemic-related information to about 15 minutes a day from reputable sources.

Social media can be helpful if people are using it to keep in meaningful contact with friends and family members, but there could also be hearsay and misinformation related to COVID-19 that is unhelpful.

6. “How are you doing with the adjustments to your daily routine?”

Having a daily routine that includes time not only for chores or work responsibilities but also for good nutrition, adequate sleep, and some exercise is important.

7. “Has your job status changed since we last spoke?”

8. “Is there increased tension in your home these days?”

The answer to this question might necessitate setting up other appointments to discuss the causes of the conflict.

Overall, your reactions to this information should follow these parameters:

- ✓ The value of empathy: communicate an appreciation for what the person is experiencing.

*“Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,
or like vinegar poured on a wound,
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.” (PROVERBS 25:20)*

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice;
mourn with those who mourn.” (ROMANS 12:15)*

- ✓ The importance of a calm (faith-filled) response.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 PETER 5:7)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7)

- ✓ Be cautious about coming across as “fake” by talking too much about your own experiences (even if they are similar), unless the other person asks you to elaborate.

“Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.” (PROVERBS 14:10)



9. “Have you done anything in response to these questions or concerns?” (And as appropriate: “What was the outcome?”)

This question helps you discern the person’s understanding of and commitment to living for the glory of God, even in times of intense difficulty. Sometimes your response can be an affirmation of what the person has already done, or perhaps a minor tweaking of what the person has already tried.

This is a great opportunity to assess the extent to which the person is in touch with others in the congregation or community who might be able to assist with particular needs (whether the person needs material goods or emotional support).

10. “Have you thought about how God might relate to these situations or concerns?”

An answer to this question points you toward understanding whether the person’s faith is central or peripheral to his or her daily choices. A “peripheral faith” is one in which God is not understood as a loving, involved, sovereign Father committed to our welfare. Instead, He is thought to be more distant, mysterious, and irrelevant. Of course, questions and concerns arise for both types of people, and your response is tailored to their particular orientation.

Some people will urgently want to delve into theological concerns about God's sovereignty or care for them. But others might not have such pressing concerns in the moment. Pastor Matt Crebbin learned this after his community had to respond to a school shooting. Based on his ministry experience, he offers the following thoughts about responding to the pandemic:

One of the mistakes many faith leaders make in the midst of a disaster and in the days and months following is: "I have been called to make meaning out of the chaos." We are the local theologians after all. In general, this is not what people need most. After the Sandy Hook Shooting, the only people who asked me, "Where was God in the midst of this?" were reporters. People living in the midst of the chaos of a disaster do not have the ability and energy required to get their heads around the "meaning of it all." What they desperately need is a purpose. This is at least one small blessing of what is happening right now for many of our people. They are being asked to practice social distancing, to alter daily routines for the sake of a higher purpose. Of course, this comes with great anxiety and grief—as well as real economic and physical hardship for many. Affirm to your people that what they are doing with their social distancing is a profound calling—a holy task of love. Also, what many people will be looking for in the coming days is a way to serve some greater purpose in the midst of the chaos.

You have the opportunity to help your community in the days ahead by creatively finding ways for people to make a difference—even in the midst of their isolation. One simple way: don't just offer prayers for your people, ask them to pray for you and for others—and tell them what a difference it makes. Identify needs in your community and invite your people to contribute. Is there a toilet paper shortage? Invite everyone to tithe from their supply. Is shopping a concern for older members? Help set up a way for other members who are willing to shop to go to the store for them (Doing all this in a manner that is informed by the best social distancing practices). If people are buying items (Even older members) invite them to purchase items for your local food bank and set up a way to collect or drop off supplies that is safe.¹

Eventually, there can be—and should be—further discussion of God's role in our trials. But right now might not be the time.

¹ Matt Crebbin, "Lessons from Ministry in the Midst of a Disaster," Healing the Healers, March 30, 2020, <https://healingthehealers.org/2020/03/lessons-from-ministry-in-the-midst-of-a-disaster-rev-matt-crebbin/>.



11. “Do you have any physical needs that our church might be able to meet?”

12. “How can I pray for you (and your family)?”

If you pray for the person at the end of a conversation, remember that your prayers can help the person reframe his or her way of looking at trials. Yet, be cautious about being too wordy, given that the conversation has come to a conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Although these are times of unprecedented new challenges, you have the distinct privilege of connecting—or reconnecting—people with our almighty, loving God. Using these questions can help you determine possible ways to make those connections.

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